

THE PORT OF ABERDEEN

By VICTORIA E. CLARK, M.A.

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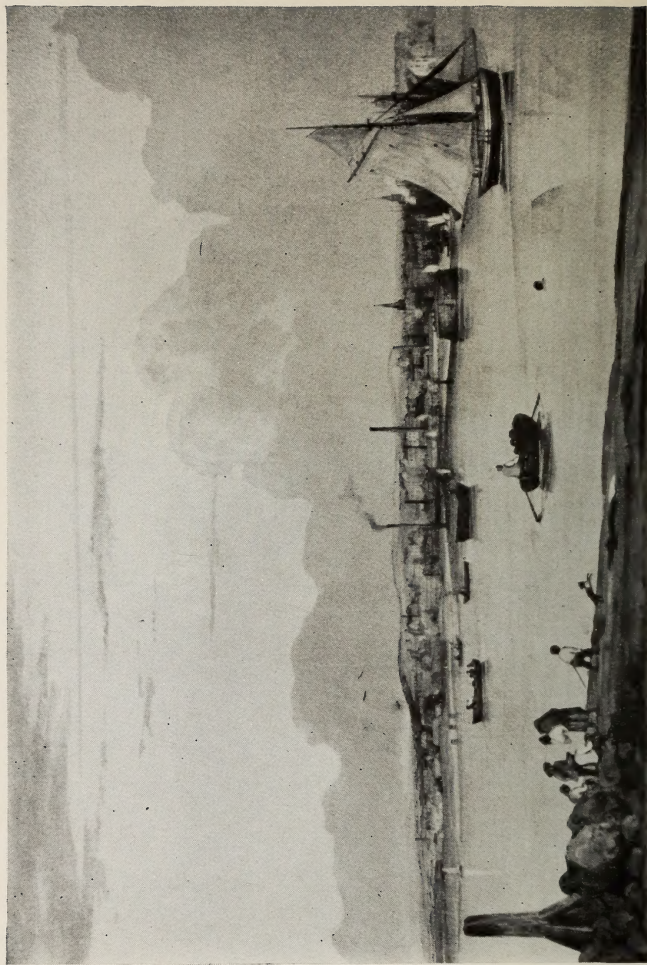
The Port of Aberdeen



THE PORT OF ABERDEEN



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ABERDEEN HARBOUR, 1838.

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The Port of Aberdeen

A HISTORY OF ITS TRADE AND
SHIPPING FROM THE 12th CENTURY
TO THE PRESENT DAY

BY

VICTORIA E. CLARK, M.A.



ABERDEEN ❁ ❁
D. WYLLIE & SON

MCMXXI

300 Copies printed, of which
this is No. 50

Dedicated
TO
THE ABERDEEN HARBOUR
COMMISSIONERS

PREFACE

NOT to those only that go down to the sea in ships, but to all whose work and interests are bound up with the trade and commerce of Aberdeen, and to those who have a regard for the history of their own town, it is hoped that this little book, to some extent, may fill a blank in local annals. It may also incidentally serve a wider purpose in showing the influence of the sea upon the rise and progress of a town.

My indebtedness for its production is due in the first instance to Mr. J. M. Bulloch, LL.D., at whose suggestion the work was undertaken, and whose advice in the collecting of data has been invaluable.

I desire also to express my gratitude to Mr. P. J. Anderson, LL.B., and the Library Staff of King's College, and also to the officials of the Town House for their un-failing courtesy and help; to the Customs Authorities both in Aberdeen and in London for permission to consult their records, and particularly to Mr. Edward Petfield, Port Surveyor at Aberdeen, for his kindly interest in, and helpful suggestions regarding, the work; to Mr. R. Gordon Nicol, Harbour Engineer, Mr. James Smith and others of Messrs. Alexander Hall and Co., and Mr. D. W. Rennie, London, to all of whom I am obliged for access to records and manuscripts in their keeping, and to Mr. William Walker, Aberdeen, for his encouragement and advice in the matter of publication.

The study of municipal records was greatly facilitated by Miss Margaret Mackenzie, M.A., who kindly placed at my disposal her admirable MSS. transcriptions and *précis* of the Propinquity and Letter Books of the Burgh of Aberdeen.

For the illustrations, I am indebted to Dr. Gordon, Town Clerk, for permission to reproduce "Aberdeen Harbour in 1838," belonging to the Corporation; and to Messrs. A. Hall and Company for "The Scottish Maid" and "The Waterside, Footdee." I have to thank many others who have helped me in various ways, including the reading of the proof sheets.

Finally, my thanks are due to the Carnegie Trust, whose grant of a Fellowship enabled me to give the time necessary for the somewhat extensive research this work entailed.

VICTORIA E. CLARK.

LONDON, *December*, 1921.

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CHAPTER I

THE PORT BEFORE 1500.

FACTS pertaining to the history of Aberdeen as a port prior to the fourteenth century are few and incomplete, but a sufficient number exist to prove that even in those early days the city was a place of considerable trade. During the thirteenth century, in the days of the Flemish settlers, it was the commercial capital of the North of Scotland, and a century before, it was known to the Norwegians as a trading town. About 1150, the buccaneering King Eystein, one of the joint sovereigns of Norway, while engaged on a piratical cruise along the east coast of Britain, landed at Aberdeen and pillaged the town.*

One of the earliest references to Aberdeen in history is in connection with shipping. In 1134, King David I granted towards the erection of the new bishopric, a tithe to be levied on all ships called "snows" which traded to and from the port. The snow was defined by the King's lawyers and others ignorant of seamanship as a *navis cana* or *candida*, a white ship, but in reality "snau" or "schnau," the vernacular name for these vessels, stood for snout or beak. They were ships probably of the largest size used for merchandise, with a prominent type of bow.†

During the reign of Alexander III, Aberdeen shared largely in the commercial prosperity of Scotland. Her

* *Annals of Commerce*. D. McPherson. Vol. I, p. 332.

† *Territorial History of Aberdeen*. G. Cadenhead. P. 9.

exports were few, being almost entirely confined to hides, furs, wool and salmon, but her trade in these was relatively extensive. Stringent laws were passed prohibiting the exportation of goods from Scotland, for the reason that the nation would be impoverished through the loss of ships and cargoes by storm and piracy. The enterprising Scottish merchants, however, ignored these restrictive measures, and in consequence frequently suffered the penalty of capture. In 1273, three Aberdeen merchants, Thomas Ker, John of Aberdeen and Walter de la Bothe, while on a voyage to St. Omer with a cargo of wool, ox hides, salmon, lamb skins, etc., were captured near Yarmouth by one John Adrian of Winchelsea, their ship plundered, and they themselves cruelly treated. They declared on oath that the wool belonged to them and to other Aberdeen merchants, whereupon Edward I ordered its restitution. This act benefited the unfortunate merchants little, as shortly afterwards their vessel was again seized and their merchandise confiscated.*

In the thirteenth century, Aberdeen had already established a reputation as an exporter of fish. In 1281 Edward I sent agents throughout the country to collect provisions for his army preparatory to an invasion of Wales. One, Adam of Fuleham, was commissioned to buy 100 barrels of sturgeons and 5,000 salt fish at Aberdeen. Long before the reputed discovery in Flanders of the art of fish-curing, Aberdeen was noted for its supply of fish pickled and cured for foreign markets.† Even Yarmouth, the capital fishing port of England, was not above importing cured fish from Aberdeen. In 1290, one-fifth of the provisions required to victual the

* *Calendar of Documents relating to Scotland.* Vol. II, p. 2.

† *Annals of Commerce.* Vol. I, p. 436.

ship fitted out at Yarmouth for bringing home the young Queen of Scotland from Norway was supplied by Aberdeen, and comprised 200 stock fish, one small barrel of sturgeons, five dozen lampreys, 50 pounds of whale, and half a last of herrings.

The first nation of the Continent to carry on a regular trade with Scotland was Flanders. The shortness of the sea voyage, the convenient market for raw materials offered to the weavers of Flanders, and the enterprise of the Flemish merchants all contributed to foster trade between the two countries.* David I of Scotland had invited foreign traders to settle in his kingdom, and in time Aberdeen and the shire became particularly distinguished for their colony of Flemings. Privileges were granted to Scottish merchants trading to and settling in Flanders. In 1293, and again in 1295, Philip IV of France ordered Count Guy de Dampierre to accord the Scottish merchants freedom of trade with Flanders. They were permitted to import their wool and other merchandise into France and Flanders, and to live there on payment of the ordinary customs dues. Similar privileges were extended to them by a charter of Louis de Male in 1395, and successively confirmed by Duke Philippe-le-Hardi in 1394, and Duke Jean sans Peur in 1407.†

Trade with Flanders was not restricted to one particular port, but Bruges was most closely associated with the Scottish ports on the east coast, and at the beginning of the fifteenth century it was recognised as the Staple town of the Scottish continental trade.

During the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries,

* *Ledger of Andrew Halyburton (1492-1503)*, note, p. liv.

† *Cartulaire de l'ancienne Estaple de Bruges*. Vol. I, pp. 52, 85, 233.

trade was carried on under considerable difficulty, and many were the valuable cargoes which failed to reach their destination, either through storm or piracy. The Scots themselves, with, perhaps, the exception of the Frisians, enjoyed the worst reputation for piracy, and men of all ranks were attracted to the sea, less by the desire for legitimate trading than the more fascinating and lucrative enterprise of plunder.* English ships were, of course, the chief prey of the Scottish sea-robbers, and in 1319 Edward II besought the merchants of Bruges to abstain from all countenance of, or aid to, the Scottish traders. The Count of Flanders prohibited all intercourse with pirates, who in the guise of Scotsmen committed many outrages, but the Burgomaster Echevins and Council of Bruges replied definitely to the English king that they could not prevent honest merchants of all countries (Scotland included) from trading with Flanders.† That country also suffered heavily, and in 1348 commissioners were appointed by the magistrates of Aberdeen, Dundee, St. Johnstone (Perth), and Edinburgh, to treat with the Flemings on the subject of reparation for losses caused by pirates.

One of the most enterprising in this field of adventure was Alexander Stuart, Earl of Mar, who on one occasion (1410) captured a small Prussian vessel on her voyage to Flanders. The goods were arrested by the Hanseatic merchants at Harfleur, where Mar had attempted to sell them, but the Parlement of Paris refused to surrender them to their rightful owner on account of the safe conduct granted to the Scotsman. From Aberdeen, Stuart wrote apologetically to Danzig, declaring that the

* *The Scots in Germany.* T. A. Fischer. P. 4.

† *Calendar of Documents relating to Scotland.* Vol. III, p. 130.

deed had been committed not by him but by Dutch fishermen.*

The Scottish ports shared the fate of other trading communities, and various references may be found to the seizure and plunder of Aberdeen ships, principally by the English. In 1302 Gregory Gordon, an Aberdeen merchant, fell into the enemy's hands while sailing from Lubeck to Scotland.† In 1365 the English king ordered his admiral at Great Yarmouth to release from arrest the "St. Mary," another Aberdeen vessel that had fallen a victim to English depredators.‡

Four years later, a number of Aberdeen merchants and others freighted two Flemish vessels at Sluys with goods to the value of £2,250 Scots. The ships were stranded off the Suffolk coast, and the cargoes plundered and carried off by wreckers in violation of the truce existing between the two kingdoms. The English sovereign commanded the admiral of his fleet in the north to order the restoration of the goods.§ Continued losses of ships had a bad effect on trade. In 1368 the number of ships entering Aberdeen harbour was about ten, and the customs duties for the year amounted to £1,960 7s. 8d. Scots. Thirty years later, only six vessels came to the port, and the customs collected only reached the sum of £544 14s. 1d. Scots.

In the early years of the fifteenth century, the effect of piracy on trade was paralysing. For a time the Hanse towns agreed to prohibit the importation of Scottish wool, a dictum which proved a severe blow to

* *The Scots in Germany*, p. 5.

† *Documents respecting Scotland* (Maitland Club), p. 82.

‡ *Rymer's Foedera Syllabus*, p. 437.

§ *Calendar of Documents relating to Scotland*. Vol. IV, p. 37.

Bruges, the centre of the woollen manufacture.* Scottish trade with that port was further disorganized on account of the traditional alliance between Flanders and England. The alliance of France and Scotland, and subsequent breach with Flanders, resulted in 1424 in the temporary removal of the Scottish Staple to Middelburg, in Zealand, and the expulsion of Flemish traders from Scotland. But at the end of the year, the Flemings sent ambassadors to the Scottish Burghs to solicit the return of the trade to Bruges. The King complied, on condition that greater privileges were granted to the Scottish merchants in Flanders.†

In spite of interruptions and impediments, trade between the two countries flourished. The commerce of the North of Scotland with the Low Countries was carried on through Aberdeen merchants and agents abroad, to whom the exported commodities were consigned, and who acted as intermediaries between Scotland and the foreigners. Aberdeen records bear sufficient testimony to the city's close connection with Flanders. Bruges served as *depôt* for all the commodities Scotland had to export, and for all goods required in return, which could not be produced at home.

The monopoly of this trade rested with Aberdeen and Leith. Wool, cloth, hides, skins, furs, salmon and trout were shipped from Scotland, the vessels returning from Bruges laden with wheat, provisions, wines, and such luxuries as the inhabitants could afford to purchase—drugs, spices, fine cloth and embroidery, gold and silver work, etc.‡

* *The Scots in Germany*, p. 18.

† *Annals of Commerce*. Vol. I, p. 640.

‡ *The Scottish Staple at Veere*. J. Davidson and A. Gray. P. 130.

In October, 1449, the Aberdeen magistrates ordered that payment towards the repair of the parish church should be made by every merchant sending goods to Bruges. The tithe consisted of four groats on every sack of wool and of skins, one on every barrel of fish, and one on each "dacre" of hides.* The trading community of Aberdeen showed itself anxious to improve trade with Flanders, and in 1478 willingly contributed a share in defraying the expenses of an embassy to the Duke of Burgundy. It had for its object the renewal and extension of privileges granted to Scottish merchants in the Duke's dominions, and the compensation for losses sustained by them. Five Aberdeen burgesses and an alderman were appointed to advise with the commissioners of the other eight burghs. The embassy proved fruitless, as the Duke perished at the siege of Nancy before anything could be accomplished.†

At that period (1450-1500) Aberdeen presented a unique picture of burghal life. Within the city itself had sprung up a trading community gradually increasing in size and in prosperity, but surrounded from without by rough and turbulent neighbours, whose predatory habits were a constant menace to the peace and progress of the town. In return for adequate protection, the citizens were glad to forgo their independence to a great extent. Consequently the municipal authorities exercised complete control over all matters relating to commerce. They were called upon to settle economic disputes arising between merchants and continental traders; they shouldered the responsibility for private trading losses, and entered into negotiations with

* *Extracts from Aberdeen Burgh Records* (Spalding Club), Vol. I, p. 18.

† *Ibid.* Vol. I, p. 410.

foreigners for the purpose of securing reparation for these. Attempts were made to stamp out the scourge of piracy, and regulations passed for the benefit of the city's trade, which was carried on by a system of common bargaining. So far as it lay in the magistrates' power, every consideration was given to foreigners trading to and from the port. Indeed, the Town Council was very jealous of the good name of the town, and in 1444, when different treatment might have been expected, the master and crew of a vessel wrecked near the shore declared they had no complaint to make against the "guid men of the toune," who had treated them with the utmost consideration.*

A dispute arose at Aberdeen in 1451 between John Ghesinot, master of a Dieppe warship, and Hans Lubec, the skipper of a merchant vessel belonging to Stralsund, with reference to the capture of the latter. The case was referred to the authorities, but in this instance the magistrates, unwilling to bear the responsibility, remitted the matter to the King and Privy Council.† In 1456, Aberdeen was partly instrumental in appointing a Scottish Consul (the first on record) in the Netherlands. With the consent of the magistrates, Lawrence Pomstraat, a burgess of Flushing, was made "host and receiver" of all Scottish merchants visiting the town. The office was evidently synonymous with that of Conservator.‡

Although the commercial activities of the magistrates were manifold, the state of the city's trade apparently did not warrant great expenditure on harbour and shipping improvements. In the middle of the century,

* *Aberdeen Burgh Records* (Spalding Club). Vol. I, p. 12.

† *Ibid.* Vol. I, p. 18.

‡ *Ledger of Andrew Haliburton*, p. lxxxii.

no more than about eight vessels entered or left the port in one year, and accommodation only for ships of small size was provided. The only erection within the harbour was a bulwark extending southwards from the Shiprow. In 1453, £50 Scots was expended on its renovation, but it often fell into disrepair. Thirty years later it had to be rebuilt. Beyond that nothing was done, and not until the next century was serious attention given to extending and improving the harbour.*

Occasionally, in place of the common bargaining under the supervision of the magistrates, there were substituted efforts towards more direct municipal trading. The records for 1489 mention the sailing of the "craft ship" out of the port of Aberdeen. As the enterprise could scarcely have been initiated by one of the crafts, which at that time had not achieved any freedom in merchandise, it may possibly have been a private venture among the merchants.†

Throughout the century, Scottish trade was not confined to the Low Countries, but the period revealed a steady development of trade with the "Easter Seas," particularly the port of Danzig, a trade which was to assume greater proportions in the following century. The decline of the Hanseatic League as a leading power opened up the Baltic lands to English and Scottish merchants, and none grasped the opportunity offered them more readily than Aberdeen. Her relations with Danzig dated from early times, and in 1410 the Town Council in a letter to the authorities of Danzig reminded them of the ancient friendship existing between Prussia and Scotland. The fact that Aberdeen merchants had to pay 40 marks for the privilege of trading with

* *The Book of Bon-Accord*, p. 275.

† *The Scottish Staple at Veere*, p. 46.

Danzig was not conducive to the fostering of friendly relations.*

From 1474 to 1476 twenty-four Scottish vessels entered Danzig, the majority sailing from Aberdeen. But ten years later, the trade between the two ports suffered a temporary eclipse, as the magistrates of Aberdeen wrote deploring the fact that all vessels from Danzig sailed into Leith and Dundee. The ostracism was the result of fraudulent dealings on the part of the citizens, who had paid a Danzig merchant in spurious money. The magistrates, anxious to propitiate Danzig and secure the renewal of trade, offered to make good the loss on condition that the defrauded merchant would appear before them personally.† A further bid was made to restore commercial intercourse by the offer of every assistance to the Danzig citizens, Vasolt and Conrad, in their trading venture in Scotland. The magistrates also expressed their willingness to compensate for any losses in shipping due to Scottish piracy.

For the greater part of the fifteenth century, Bruges still remained the centre for Scottish traders, and as the clearing house for commodities of Russia, Scandinavia, England, Scotland, Spain, and France, the Mediterranean and the East, she held a pre-eminent position, and one which was unrivalled till the gradual growth of Holland and Zealand challenged her supremacy, and finally injured her commercial prosperity.

The event which hastened the decline of Bruges was the insurrection of the Flemings against Maximilian of Austria (1488), his imprisonment in Bruges, and the subsequent punishment meted out to the city. English

* *The Scots in Germany*, p. 10.

† *Aberdeen Burgh Records* (Spalding Club). Vol. I, p. 19.

and foreign trading companies transferred their Staple to Antwerp, but Scottish merchants established themselves in the island of Walcheren, and about 1500 used the city of Middelburg as a distributing centre for the markets of Bruges, Bergen, and Antwerp. Authorities on the subject of the Scottish Staple differ regarding the establishment of Campvere as the Staple port in the Netherlands. According to the editor of *Halyburton's Ledger*, the Staple was transferred to Campvere in 1444, when Mary of Scotland married Wolfred, Lord of Campvere.* The joint authors of "The Scottish Staple at Veere" assert that there is no evidence in support of the statement that Campvere became the Staple town on the event of Mary's marriage. Trade was encouraged, and the importance of Campvere increased, but it was in no sense a Staple town till the sixteenth century.†

The concluding years of the century witnessed a greater breach between England and Scotland, a closer alliance of Scotland with France, and strained relations with Burgundy. In 1498 Commissioners, including John Rutherford, alderman in Aberdeen, were sent by the Royal Burghs to Philip, Archduke of Austria, the son of Maria of Burgundy, to enquire about the letters of marque which had been issued against the Scots.‡ James IV forbade all vessels to sail to any part of the Duke's dominions, but granted exemption in the case of a ship of Campvere lying at Aberdeen "ladyne and chargit with merchandise and gudis of St. Nicholas of Abirdene." The ship had been loaded before the issue of the King's proclamation, and as the goods were in

* *Ledger of Andrew Halyburton*, p. liv.

† *Scottish Staple at Veere*, pp. 131-136.

‡ *The Scottish Staple in the Netherlands*. M. P. Rooseboom. P. 29.

danger of being damaged, Neilball, the skipper, was granted freedom to pass unmolested to Campvere or other parts.*

The function of Conservator was equivalent to that of a consul, with more clearly defined powers, an extensive jurisdiction over Scottish subjects and in all disputes between Scottish merchants. His duties were varied, including even the supervision of personal attire. Measures were taken to ensure that the merchants were suitably dressed, and the Conservator was empowered to confiscate the goods of those whose clothes were not sufficiently presentable. Complaints on this score were lodged against Robert Buchan, an Aberdeen merchant, who, in 1484, was ordered by the magistrates to procure a new gown and doublet each time he intended going to Flanders; to ride in a cart with four of his neighbours, and share in its hire.†

The principal Aberdeen merchants and traders of that day were the Cullans, Andrew and John, the former a prominent burgess and noted benefactor of St. Nicholas Church for many years; John and David Rattray, Thomas Pratt, William Fiddes, his son Andrew, who acted as his factor abroad; Robert Blyndsele, Robert Craig, and Andrew Bisset.‡

All these men had numerous transactions with the Conservator in the Netherlands, to whom they shipped cargoes of hides, wool, and salmon for sale in Bruges, Middelburg, and Campvere. Neilball, Nicholas Ramsay, John Schewall, Harry Scott, were some of the skippers who sailed from the port with these goods. Not infrequently the merchants themselves accompanied

* *Aberdeen Burgh Records* (Spalding Club). Vol. I, pp. 426-7.

† *Ibid.* Vol. I, p. 413.

‡ *Ledger of Andrew Halyburton*, p. lxiv, et seq.

their cargoes and transacted their business personally. Others sent relatives to look after their commercial interests. In return for the raw commodities, manufactured goods and various articles of luxury were imported. Trade was engaged in on a small scale, the merchants being merely retail dealers. Ships coming to the port were usually laden with a heterogeneous collection of goods packed together in the same bale or pipe.* In October, 1488, Andrew Cullan shipped wool, salmon, and grilse to Bruges, receiving in return wheat, salt, damsons, soap, vinegar, and other articles. The following year Neilball's ship carried home from Antwerp to Cullan's account a bale containing madder, black "ryssyllis" (russels cloth), red buckram, hats, bonnets, hemp, fustian, camlet cloth, pepper, pans, ginger, cinnamon, alum, and sugar.

One of the most interesting accounts was that of Bishop Elphinstone, who was then engaged on his great undertaking, the building of King's College. His remittances were made in wool, lasts of salmon, barrels of trout, and a certain proportion of money. In exchange he imported carts, wheelbarrows and gunpowder, to quarry the stone for his college. Spices and comfits, clothes, church vessels, "a counterfeit chalice and two chalices of silver double overgilt each in its case," were among the articles shipped to him in 1498.

Halyburton's Ledger clearly illustrates the absence of actual money at that period. Incomes were not reckoned in £. s. d., but in meal, malt, and other commodities, the portion not required for home consumption being converted into comforts and luxuries, next in

* *Ledger of Andrew Halyburton*, p. 180.

importance to food.* The lack of money was common to all classes, from the landed proprietor to the humble citizen. When called upon to subscribe towards the repairing of their church, the majority of Aberdeen burgesses, zealous followers of their patron saint, promised to pay in kind according to the commodities in which they dealt. The subscriptions included a barrel of salmon, 25 lamb skins, a cow, a piece of lead, and eight days' labour.†

The scarcity of money in Scotland led to the adoption of numerous devices to prevent its exportation. In 1425 it was enacted that custom should be paid to the king, amounting to 40 pence in the £ on all money exported. Provision was made in 1449 for the appointment of searchers, and rewards offered to citizens instrumental in preventing its being sent abroad. Other stringent measures were passed in the expectation that bullion would come into the country in large quantities. Intending travellers were permitted to take only what would cover moderate expenses; the foreign trader had to produce evidence that the money acquired by the sale of goods had been reconverted into goods of this country, and extensive regulations were passed that the Scottish trader in exchange for his articles of export should bring home a certain proportion of money. The amount on each commodity was later fixed by law.

But other nations passed similar laws in regard to the export of money, and the theory based on the balance of bargains had to be abandoned in favour of one more enlightened, founded on balance of trade. The merchants, faced with the impossibility of strictly adhering to the law, and resenting the limitations

* *Ledger of Andrew Halyburton*, p. lxix-lxx.

† *Aberdeen Burgh Records* (Spalding Club). Vol. I, p. 48.

imposed on their commercial freedom, began themselves to realize sounder theories of foreign trade.* The Royal Burghs pointed out the difficulties in conforming to the laws respecting the importation of bullion, and complained of the injury inflicted to trade in general. In 1492 the Aberdeen magistrates, doubtless under the pressure of necessity, glimpsed a more advanced and sounder commercial policy when they ordered that all traders about to export goods from the port should in return bring home a certain proportion of goods "for furnishing the town with merchandise." All who failed in their duty were required to pay freight dues for the given amount and twelve shillings towards the work of St. Nicholas.†

* *Scottish Staple at Veere*, p. 79 et seq.

† *Aberdeen Burgh Records* (Spalding Club). Vol. I, p. 419.

CHAPTER II

THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

THE most important feature of the sixteenth century, from a commercial point of view, was the rapid development of trade between Scotland and the "Eastlands"—the Baltic cities of Prussia, Pomerania, and Poland, particularly Danzig and Stralsund. 1500 marked the beginning of a continuous and ever-increasing wave of emigration from the northern kingdom to the Baltic ports. Poverty and famine, and political and religious strife, were not conducive to commercial prosperity at home. The Scots, however, sought better opportunities abroad.

England, as the enemy of Scotland, was closed against the emigrants; France had not the same trading facilities to offer; Holland was already overrun by Scots, but Poland, whose trade was in the hands of Jews and foreigners, presented an attractive field for enterprise. It was looked on as the "heaven for the nobility, the paradise for the Jews, the hell for the peasant, and the gold mine for the stranger."*

Danzig was resorted to by Scottish merchant adventurers of all classes, ranging from the influential wholesale trader to the humble packman. From Danzig these Scotsmen passed inland to the Polish provinces extending from the Baltic to the Black Sea.

Evidence of the active participation of Aberdeen merchants in the Baltic trade is to be found in the

* *The Scots in Germany*, p. 32.

number of names on the burgess roll connected with Danzig. Skene, Forbes, Turner, Gordon, Burnett, Fergusson, Coutts, Leslie, Chalmers, Barclay, More, Farquhar, Abercrombie and others, were as well known in the Baltic states as in Aberdeen. Robert Gordon of Straloch, with the wealth he accumulated in Danzig, founded Robert Gordon's Hospital.* David Skene, a native of Aberdeen, was made a citizen of Posen in 1586, and was connected by marriage with another Scottish merchant in Danzig named Chalmers. Other Skene relatives owned large cloth manufactories and sugar refineries in Perau and Brunn.

The burgesses were called upon to pay a special fee for admission to the privilege of this trade, and so profitable did commerce between Aberdeen and Danzig become, that in 1566 a special duty was imposed on all goods imported from the latter town. At an earlier date (1518), the merchants and magistrates unanimously agreed to grant to their patron, St. Nicholas, for the upkeep of their parish kirk, two shillings "great Flanders" money for every sack of goods exported to France, Flanders, or the Baltic countries. †

Ships belonging to the port laden with cargoes of wool, skins, hides and salmon, sailed to Danzig, returning with wheat and other foodstuffs. "The Andrew," "Lie-by-the-Fire," "The Gift of God," "The Nicholas," "The John," and others were all engaged in the trade. In 1556 the magistrates ordered William Cargill to pay to Alexander Rutherford, according to his promise, the duty of St. Nicholas on the wheat recently imported from Danzig in "Lie-by-the-Fire." ‡

* *History of Aberdeen and Banff*. Wm. Watt. P. 313.

† *Ledger of Andrew Halyburton*, p. lxxxii.

‡ *Aberdeen Burgh Records* (Spalding Club). Vol. I, p. 299.

Gilbert Menzies imported a cargo of grain from Danzig in 1563, and the following year, not one, but several ships similarly laden arrived in Aberdeen from the Baltic port.

Every endeavour was made to foster and encourage the city's trade: for example, certain privileges were granted to Aberdeen ships in regard to loading. A letter from the king (June, 1540) expressly stated that no "stranger ship" was to be loaded with goods until all the town's ships were "first staykit."*

Though Aberdeen's trade with the Baltic was comparatively prosperous, any danger which threatened its commercial relations was reviewed with the utmost alarm. About 1540 two Pomeranian skippers, whose ships had been captured by French pirates and brought to Aberdeen, complained that the cargoes had been illegally confiscated by the town. In spite of having obtained justice in the highest court of the land, the two men, on their return home, so misrepresented the case, that the Pomeranian authorities issued letters commanding the seizure of all goods belonging to Scottish merchants in Stralsund. †

In those days the plague was a great obstruction to trade, and ships suspected of the fell disease were summarily dealt with. The Aberdeen magistrates issued measures from time to time for the protection of the citizens, making it illegal for any dweller in the town to house or feed a person infected by the plague. In 1500 a ship entered the harbour from Danzig, where the plague was raging; the cargo was burned and the sailors kept in strict quarantine for several days. No food was received from shore, save under the supervision of a magistrate.

* *Aberdeen Burgh Records* (Spalding Club). Vol. I, p. 173.

† *Episcopal Register of Scotland*. Vol. II, p. 322.

Aberdeen's foreign trade, at that time, was by no means confined to Danzig and the cities of the "Eastlands." Campvere was still closely associated with the east coast of Scotland, but in the first half of the century it suffered temporary eclipse, due principally to the contest waged by Campvere, Middelburg, and Antwerp for the monopoly of Scottish trade. In the negotiations, which lasted for forty years, each of the three rival towns offered distinct natural advantages which had to be considered in fixing the situation of the Scottish Staple.

Antwerp, as the chief city of the Low Countries, offered great facilities in buying and selling to Scottish traders, but was inferior in situation to Middelburg and Campvere. Middelburg, though more accessible, was not a trading centre like Antwerp. Campvere was best situated for Scottish ships, and the smallness of the town, normally a drawback to trade, was, in the eyes of the exclusive Scots, an additional asset. The preference, ultimately given to Campvere, was not due, however, to either of these advantages, but to the exertions of Duke Maximilian of Burgundy, whose active interest in the town made it the Staple for Scottish trade.

The royal burghs in 1522 signified their readiness to settle the Staple in any one of the towns mentioned.* But it became evident that agreement with one did not afford that freedom of trade which the burghs desired. Middelburg failed to secure the privilege, and negotiations ended in the definite statement that the merchants should be allowed to trade where they considered it most profitable. Aberdeen in particular clung to the commercial freedom guaranteed by the repudiation of the treaty with Middelburg. In 1530, when it was believed

* *The Scottish Staple at Veere*, pp. 144-155.

that a definite settlement might be made, the magistrates, in electing commissioners to the Convention of Burghs, and empowering them to act on behalf of the town, added the clause that the commissioners should not renounce the privilege granted to the merchants of "passing and repassing where they should be best treated."*

Later (1539), when Edinburgh was prepared to meet the advances of Antwerp, provided the latter should not demand the sole monopoly of her trade, Aberdeen, exercising greater caution, insisted on first seeing a copy of the privileges to be granted. Negotiations again failed, and the following year, when the question of a port in Zealand was mooted, Aberdeen once more asserted her right to freedom of trade by refusing to be bound down to one Staple.†

The contest was finally settled in 1541, and for two-and-a-half centuries, with only two interruptions, Campvere remained the Staple town for Scottish traders.

In their dealings with Campvere, the Aberdeen merchants did not always enjoy the freedom they coveted. Private disputes arose concerning trade, and on one occasion Provost Menzies wrote to the authorities complaining in no measured terms of the treatment which his relatives, the Cullans, received at the hands of a Vere merchant. Both Andrew and Robert Cullan had been imprisoned, apparently without cause.‡

It has been noted that Andrew Cullan was one of the outstanding figures in the commercial life of the town towards the end of the fifteenth century, and

* *Records of the Convention of Royal Burghs.* Vol. I, p. 513.

† *Ibid.* Vol. I, p. 517.

‡ *The Scottish Staple in the Netherlands.* M. P. Rooseboom. P. 76.

during the early part of the sixteenth. He was the prototype of Andrew Buk, who in the latter half of the century, as a shipowner and trader on a comparatively large scale, had an important share in the development of Aberdeen's trade. His mercantile ventures, however, did not always meet with unqualified success. In 1558 a ship freighted by him with salmon and hides for John Smith of Flushing, returned to the port with a cargo of wine, alum, salt, etc. A leaking wine butt and the contact of badly-packed goods with salt water wrought considerable havoc in the cargo, and Buk brought an action against the skipper, Martin Michaelson.* Later, a ship belonging to the merchant, laden with provisions, ran for the Firth of Forth, and arriving off Kirkcaldy was seized by warrant of a Council held at Leith on 13th April, 1572, on the ground that it was intended to carry the goods out of the kingdom or "to furneis our Soverane Lordis declarit rebellis and disobedient subjects therewith." †

As part-owner of the "John" of Aberdeen, Buk was compelled by the magistrates in 1561 to pay his share in the expenses entailed during the winter months when the vessel lay in Danzig harbour. John Dunce, the skipper, built at his own expense a timber wall "for the good of the ship and the safety of the merchandise and mariners." Having proved that the expenses incurred were expedient, the Council ordered the owners to refund the money to the skipper. ‡

Buk was frequently chosen by the burgh to act in the interests of the owners of Aberdeen vessels wrecked

* *Aberdeen Burgh Records* (Spalding Club). Vol. I, p. 310.

† *Privy Council Register*. Vol. II, p. 131.

‡ *Aberdeen Burgh Records* (Spalding Club). Vol. II, pp. 331-2.

at sea. In 1576 the "Thomas" was wrecked off the coast of Holland, and part of the ship's cargo having been salvaged by the Dutch, Buk was appointed to recover the price received for the goods and to hand it over to the High Admiral for distribution among those entitled to it.* About this time money was raised throughout the country to ransom a number of unfortunate Scotsmen captured by Algerian pirates. Buk was appointed Treasurer, and discharged his duties successfully till his death in 1583, when his son Thomas took over the accounts. But the collection amounting to £564 Scots benefited the captives not at all, they having died in the interval. After deducting the necessary expenses, the King and Privy Council agreed to devote the remainder towards effecting the release of David Hume, a skipper, detained at Bordeaux.†

Aberdeen's increasing commercial prosperity called for municipal action in improving and enlarging the harbour and in passing measures for the benefit of trade. The one quay which the port then possessed was in constant need of repair, and in 1596 King James VI granted for five years certain dues on goods and shipping for the building and repairing of the bulwark, pier, shore and harbour—two shillings for every ton of goods imported and exported, and twelve pence (Scots) each ton on the vessel; the only goods that were duty free were coal, lime, slate and freestone.‡

Before the sixteenth century little was done to reduce the natural risks arising from navigation, and the erection of beacons by the burghs marked the first step towards progress. Aberdeen possessed some kind of

* *Privy Council Register*. Vol. II, p. 585.

† *Ibid.* Vol. II, p. 585; vol. III, p. 604.

‡ *Records of the Convention of Royal Burghs*. Vol. I, p. 486.

beacon before this time, and opposite the Sandness (where a blockhouse or fort was commenced in 1532 and completed ten years later) a little watch-tower was built on high ground and fitted with a bell to be rung on the approach of a ship.* But no adequate beacon for the guidance of ships was built until 1566, when the Aberdeen Council decided to erect a "gryt bowat or lamp" in the east gable of St. Ninian's Chapel on the Castle-hill. The lamp had three flaming lights, which were to burn continuously from 1st September to 31st March. For its upkeep and the maintenance of a keeper, an elaborate system of dues was instituted. The duties on exports varied according to the country to which the goods were sent. Sixpence was the rate charged on all imports, with one exception: the duty on every "last" of goods from Danzig was doubled, but was exacted only from Aberdeen merchants. Further duties were levied on all ships entering the port—five shillings on Aberdeen vessels and three shillings on foreign ships of forty tons or over, eighteen pence on every "crear,"† and sixpence on each boat. A collector was appointed, the first to hold office being John Tullidef, while the first lighthouse keeper was Sir John Wright.‡

The Town Council's efforts to lessen the dangers to which mariners were exposed called forth response from other quarters. Robert Lindsay, an Aberdeen pilot, furnished the magistrates with a sea-chart "containing many good and profitable instructions for those trading on the sea to foreign lands"; he was rewarded with the sum of forty marks.§

* *The Book of Bon-Accord*, p. 278.

† "Crear," or lighter—small boat which carried goods from ships to shore.

‡ *Aberdeen Burgh Records* (Spalding Club). Vol. I, p. 361.

§ *Ibid.* Vol. II, p. 158.

Measures were passed which marked the beginning of definite harbour and shipping regulations. In 1511 it was enacted that ships should lie in the "gawpuyl," and not between the Ferryhouse and the mouth of the river. Later, any vessel casting out her ballast within flood-mark was subjected to a fine of 40s. Scots.* The accommodation of the harbour must have been severely taxed in 1587, when, according to a diary of the period, one hundred Scottish ships—presumably fishing boats—arrived in the roads of Aberdeen, and entered the harbour.†

In regard to the loading and unloading of ships, Aberdeen was jealous of its rights as a free port, and from time to time protested against the usurpation of its privileges by Peterhead, Newburgh, and the smaller creeks. Complaints were made to the Convention at Edinburgh, but the practice continued apparently for some time. In 1573 a number of ships from Norway discharged cargoes at Newburgh, whereupon the Town Council issued an order for all ships to unload at Aberdeen. The Dean of Guild and the Treasurer were sent to Newburgh to arrest the ships and remove the sails.‡

Growth of trade involved an increase in duties levied on imports and exports, which led to numerous attempts to evade, and stringent regulations to enforce the Customs. A ship whose cargo contained goods not entered in the "cocket," or clerk's book, was declared by the Privy Council (1561) to be unlawfully loaded for the purpose of defrauding the King's Customs. Any ship found sailing without a cocket was henceforth to

* *The Book of Bon-Accord*, p. 277.

† *Sum Notabill Thinges*, p. 22.

‡ *Aberdeen Burgh Records* (Spalding Club). Vol. II, pp. 10 and 81.

be regarded as a pirate and the legitimate prey of anyone. Under such circumstances the owners of goods could claim no redress.

Goods belonging to Tullidef and other Aberdeen burgesses, and shipped to Flanders without being mentioned in the cockets, were arrested by Halket, the Conservator, as uncustomed goods. Caution was given by Alexander Cullan and Patrick Abercrombie for the owners that they would abide by the King's judgment in the case, in view of which the goods were ordered to be restored to the merchants *

The *Privy Council Register* records an instance where the Aberdeen merchants allowed their acute business instincts to overstep the bounds of honesty. At that period (1576), hides formed a large proportion of their export trade, and the merchants were charged with packing their skins so as greatly to defraud the Customs. The skins should have been packed in hundreds of six score, but apparently "a greit nowmer ma was packit," and the collectors and clerks of the cocket received orders to attend to their business more strictly in future. †

In the supervision of trade relations, the magistrates made it their business to effect a fair distribution of goods among the citizens. A certain amount of compulsion was at times necessary. All cargoes brought to Aberdeen for sale were bought by the provost and baillies, and every burghess had to purchase his share according to his estate, those who refused being deprived of their freedom and burghal rights. ‡ About 1549 the Council decided that those participating in the last Flemish ship should have no share in the next, but that it should be

* *Privy Council Register*. Vol. III (1578-85), p. 136.

† *Ibid.* Vol. II, p. 515.

‡ *Aberdeen Burgh Records* (Spalding Club). Vol. I, p. 220.

divided among "the remanent of the nychtbouris that gat na part of the geir of this ship."*

The baillies had difficulty sometimes in disposing of their purchases. In 1561, they found no buyers for a large quantity of wine, the cargoes of two French ships. As an inducement to buy, the merchants were warned that in future preference would be given to those who would relieve the magistrates of their bad bargain.†

In spite of their efforts, however, complaints were made of unfair distribution in favour of particular individuals. The right of entry of every ship to the port was given to the town's Customer, who notified the Council. To obviate the difficulty, the guild brethren were divided into four sections (with a baillie in charge of each), the goods being distributed to each in rotation. Any quarter refusing to accept its share in turn forfeited the right to any merchandise for a year. Further, any person going to the port to bargain privately, was fined £10 Scots, deprived of the goods purchased, and lost his share in all future transactions for the same period.‡

The problem of piracy was one which exercised the Aberdeen magistrates greatly. When local ships were captured, recourse was had to a system of reprisal. But unsatisfied creditors and outraged shipowners had to be reckoned with, and it behoved those in authority to act warily lest such a system endanger the town's commercial prosperity. As in the previous century, Aberdeen was anxious to maintain "a good bruit and name," and in 1546 regulations were passed to the effect that no person,

* *Aberdeen Burgh Records* (Spalding Club). Vol. I, p. 264.

† *Ibid.* Vol. I, p. 329.

‡ *Ibid.* Vol. I, pp. 334-5.

freeman or unfreeman, should interfere with any ship or cargo without special licence from the Council, under pain of losing his privileges as a citizen. This law was the immediate outcome of the arbitrary seizure of a ship by Melchior Cullan and his colleagues.*

But the measure, if not legally stated, was in active operation before this time. In 1508 a complaint was lodged by the masters of two Scarborough ships damaged and driven into Aberdeen by contrary winds. The vessels had been seized by Sir John Rutherford and Andrew Fife without the permission of the magistrates, and the latter ordered the ships to be released, and pointed out to the petitioners that the town must not be held responsible for the affair.† In 1544 Robert Patterson, the captain of a Dundee ship of war, sailed into the port with a prize ship from Stockholm laden with timber, hides, etc. Provost Menzies arrested the ship at the instance of the community, but later surrendered it on the understanding that Aberdeen would suffer no blame in the matter.‡ Yet another instance may be cited. Gilbert Menzies of Torry seized two English ships in 1557, on the plea that between England and Scotland there existed a state of potential if not of actual war. The skippers appealed to the Council, but Menzies disputed the latter's right to interfere, since the ships were taken "within his lands of Torry," an area outside the Council's jurisdiction. He quoted examples of Scottish ships plundered by the English since their declaration of war against France, and in further extenuation of his action declared that the English had seized his brother, Thomas, from a Flushing ship in 1551, when, in spite

* *Aberdeen Burgh Records* (Spalding Club). Vol. I, p. 241.

† *Ibid.* Vol. I, p. 439.

‡ *Ibid.* Vol. I, pp. 304-5.

of a safe-conduct, they confiscated his goods to the value of £900 Scots, and kept him a prisoner for twelve weeks without recompense or redress. The magistrates, as far as their powers would allow, granted liberty to English vessels to come and go unmolested, but as regards the action Gilbert Menzies disclaimed all responsibility.

Though anxious to keep the town "sraithless," the municipal authorities were not slow in making reprisals on the capture of one of their ships, and so rampant did piracy become in the seventies and eighties, that arbitrary methods were almost the only ones possible. English and Scottish pirates infested the coast, and letters of safe-conduct, granted to merchants passing between the two kingdoms or sailing to the Continent, provided little protection. James Halkerstoun and Matthew Sinclair, two notorious pirates, committed serious depredations on shipping in the north, and the Privy Council ordered the magistrates of Aberdeen to search for and, if possible, apprehend the criminals and detain them, pending trial. Failure to comply with these instructions was to be regarded as a tacit acknowledgment of the town's share in, and sympathy with, piracy.*

The Scottish Burghs complained bitterly of the losses to shipping caused by the English, and different methods were adopted to stamp out the pest. Adam Fullerton, a prominent burghess of Edinburgh, was sent in 1579 as an ambassador to Queen Elizabeth to seek redress. But a holiday in London at the Burghs' expense was regarded by Fullerton, apparently, as an opportunity not to be wasted, and representatives of the irate Scottish merchants—among them David Endeoch of Aberdeen—complained to the Privy Council of Fullerton's failure to carry out his mission.†

* *Privy Council Register*. Vol. II, pp. 222-3.

† *Ibid.* Vol. III, p. 269.

The Burghs next decided to fit out a warship in pursuit of the English pirates, and in January, 1587, a tax of 200 marks was imposed on Aberdeen as her share in the enterprise. The following year, a sum of £102 Scots, together with six barques, was handed over by the town.*

The public accounts of the city for 1596 give an accurate statement of the expense entailed in the execution of four pirates who had plundered a ship from Danzig.†

Throughout this period, Aberdeen fitted out or helped to provide several ships for the King's service. Maritime power was almost unknown in Scotland in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, ships for warfare being fitted out on emergency by the sea-coast burghs or hired out by individuals. About 1475 three ships appear to have been supplied by Aberdeen for this purpose at the expense of the citizens. A ship furnished with guns, culverins, ammunition, and other military stores, manned by twenty-four Aberdeen mariners, sailed from the port in that year to join the Scottish squadron in the Firth of Forth. The magistrates agreed to pay the owners the same rate of hire paid by Dundee for a similar ship. As the two nations were at peace, it is not clear for what expedition the fleet was intended, but probably the squadron was required to convoy the King of Scotland to England to discuss with Henry VIII the question of the Reformation.‡

The burgh records give a complete account of the steps taken in 1540 to furnish a warship at the town's expense. The public funds being insufficient to cover

* *Letters received by the Burgh* (MSS.). Vol. I, No. 70.

† *The Scots in Germany*, p. 6.

‡ *Annals of Aberdeen*. Wm. Kennedy. Vol. I, p. 72.

the cost, it was agreed to impose a general tax on the burgh "according to the substance and faculty of each individual," the maximum to be 500 marks. All who failed to pay were to be poinded. Andrew Menzies was appointed to collect the tax, pay the mariners, and supply the ship with victuals. None of the inhabitants were permitted to dispose of anything which might be of service—guns, culverins, powder, harness, pikes, etc. A list was drawn up of persons chosen to serve on board the man-of-war, and the leading burgesses, including Gilbert Menzies, Andrew Cullan, John Collison, and Andrew Tullidef, were appointed to fix the salary of each individual according to "his quality."*

The north-east coast was the scene of considerable warlike activity during the succeeding years. In 1543 fifteen ships of the French navy were reported to be lying off Aberdeen in wait for the English fleet. The French expected to be joined by the Danish navy, but Sir Ralph Sadler, writing to the Privy Council at this time, stated that a French invasion of Scotland gave no cause for anxiety, since if a few men landed they would be readily overcome, while a large number would be "starved in this country for hunger." Some of the French landed at Aberdeen carrying letters for the Queen Dowager, the Cardinal, and Lennox. †

Aberdeen joined with the other burghs, to the extent of 2,000 marks, in fitting out a ship to convey Lord Seton, the Scots Ambassador, to France. Payment was made by the Council on the understanding that the municipal exchequer would be replenished by taxation.‡

* *Aberdeen Burgh Records* (Spalding Club). Vol. I, pp. 169-70.

† *Hamilton Papers*. Vol. I, p. 549.

‡ *Privy Council Register*. Vol. III, p. 612.

In 1589 the city was called upon to make another effort in this direction. The "Nicholas" was furnished to form part of a squadron to bring the King and his Queen, Anne of Denmark, back to Scotland. The ship sailed from the port on 16th April, armed and decorated with "ensigns, flags, red taffeta streamers of war, red side cloths and gilded tops." John Collison, baillie, was appointed Commander-in-Chief, and David Endeoch his deputy. The crew numbered thirty sailors, including six expert pilots; the ordnance consisted of six pieces of cast iron and the town's cannon called "The Falcon," the latter being used both for defence and decoration. A goodly supply of provisions was placed on board—salmon, fresh and salted; beef, oat bread, white biscuit, butter, claret and ale.*

If the ordnance was not formidable, the supply of powder was still more meagre. Lord Dingwall, who apparently inspected the ships, reported to the King that they lacked the requisite amount, and Aberdeen, not being possessed of a superfluity of this article, had to press for funds to purchase an additional supply.†

During the latter half of the century, the sea-coast towns were threatened repeatedly with the danger of a Spanish invasion. Thomas Randolph wrote to a correspondent in 1570: "We fear continually here the coming of the Spaniards and thereof have the more certainty, for there is a pink arrived at Aberdeen out of Flanders on Monday eight days, in her one John Hamilton, who has long attended upon the Duke of Alva, to solicit him to the support of that faction."‡

* *Aberdeen Council Register* (MSS.). Vol. XXXIII, pp. 598, 736.

† *Privy Council Register*. Vol. IV, p. 506.

‡ *Calendar of State Papers*. Vol. III, 25th August, 1570.

Rumours were rife that five or six thousand Spaniards were about to land at Aberdeen to join forces with the Catholic lords of the north, but the reports were never confirmed, though Spain kept in close touch with the Earls of Huntly, Errol and Crawford by means of ships sailing to and from the port.

In August, 1588, orders were issued by the Privy Council for a strict watch to be kept along the coasts for the Spanish Armada, when again it was rumoured that the Spaniards and Barbars had landed at Aberdeen and Cromarty. Even after the defeat of the Armada, the danger, so far as the north was concerned, was not at an end. The Catholic party were in open insurrection at Aberdeen, and in March of the following year, the magistrates were ordered to seize all vessels outward bound and remove their sails until caution be found "that they shall not transport forth of this realm or yet bring within the same any Jesuits, excommunicated persons, seminary priests, passengers, strangers, nor other enemies to the truth, their books, letters nor messages, private or public." *

In the early nineties, the capture of letters written in English, Latin and French, from the Scottish Jesuits to the Spanish Court, disclosed the important fact that the whole island was threatened by a foreign invasion. The King of Spain, convinced that the disaster of 1588 was due to mismanagement, was led to believe that an attack on Scotland, backed by the Catholic party there, would be more successful. An army raised by the Scottish Catholic lords with Spanish money would first subdue Scotland and follow up its victory by subjugating England.

* *Privy Council Register.* Vol. IV, p. 311, note.

Aberdeen was then the most disaffected area. On 16th July, 1594, the " *Esperance* " of Calais sailed into Aberdeen harbour carrying on board James Gordon, uncle of the Earl of Huntly, and three Jesuits. The baillies apprehended them with a view to transporting them south to await the King's pleasure. Twelve citizens were appointed to go with them.* But the Earls of Angus and Huntly, hearing of their detention, came in hot haste to Aberdeen with some score of horsemen and ordered the release of the prisoners, under threat of burning the town. The authorities, though unwilling, found it expedient to agree to the demands of these powerful Earls rather than imperil the town by fire and sword. †

Meantime the Privy Council were taking every precaution for the defence of the country. Sentence of treason was passed against the conspirators; Huntly, Errol, and others were sent into exile, where they plotted incessantly for their repatriation under Spanish auspices. Towards the end of 1595, the report that the Spanish fleet to the number of 300 sail was lying at Biscay caused widespread alarm. But as the menace never materialised into an actual danger, fears began to die down, though for many years Scottish merchants and traders were harassed by Spanish pirates. George Strachan, an Aberdeen baillie, was among the unfortunate. One of his ships was captured and pillaged by the Spaniards, and, having determined to visit Spain to seek some recompense for his loss, he asked the Town Council for financial assistance. The Treasurer was ordered to pay Strachan £100 Scots. ‡

* *Aberdeen Burgh Records* (Spalding Club). Vol. II, p. 91.

† *Privy Council Register*. Vol. V, p. 156, note.

‡ *Aberdeen Burgh Records* (Spalding Club). Vol. II, p. 159.

CHAPTER III

PROGRESS AND DECAY IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

IN the history of Scottish commerce, the seventeenth century was an era of retrogression rather than development. So far as Aberdeen was concerned, the period was marked by progress in certain directions; her trade was relatively extensive, new industries sprang up, old ones flourished, new markets abroad were opened to her ships, and her economic relations with such ports as Danzig and Campvere were maintained in spite of the many serious dislocations to trade which occurred from time to time. In the earlier and brighter years of the century, she was reputed to send to sea ships and cargoes of greater value than any of the other burghs, and the loss of a single Aberdeen ship, according to Sir Patrick Drummond, one of the Conservators of the Netherlands, was more serious than the loss of ten ships of other towns. Yet before the end of that period, endless foreign wars, short-sighted commercial policy, civil strife at home, piracy and plague, had reduced the shipping, and consequently the trade of the port, to a minimum.

Commerce was carried on along much the same lines as in the preceding century. Spain, France, Flanders, Zealand, Holland and the Baltic, were still closely associated with the ports on the east coast of Scotland. The old privileges with France came to an end at the Union, but trading relations with that country continued, though often interrupted by warfare. Ships plied their trade between the port and Danzig, Königs-

berg, Bergen, Stockholm, Gottenburg, Hamburg, Campvere, Rotterdam, Ostend, Havre, Bordeaux, Cadiz, Marseilles, etc., with cargoes of salmon, skins, pork, and woollen goods, returning with stores of manufactured goods, wines, brandy, sugar, soap, tobacco, and food-stuffs. Consignments of timber, wainscot, lint, flour, grain, iron and glass, came from Germany. But in 1621 the trade in foreign glass was carefully regulated by proclamation, as the home-made article was likely to prove "ane grite comfort and credit to the countrie."*

From the Union of England and Scotland it was hoped that commercial friendship between the two nations would be more firmly cemented. But Scotland gained no share in England's foreign trade, and in consequence of civil war, commercial jealousy, and the restrictions of the Navigation Act, her coasting trade was confined almost entirely to the east coast ports, from the Shetlands to Prestonpans. With these, Aberdeen exchanged her staple commodities for coal, white-salt, iron, slates, lime, etc. It must be remembered that the commercial capital of Scotland was in those days quite insignificant as a shipping centre, beyond its trade with America. In 1692 a Glasgow ship came to the port, but, apart from some slight intercourse with Ayr and Greenock, there was little communication between east and west, and the latter was of minor importance in the trading life of Scotland.†

The seventeenth century marked the beginning of Scottish trade with the Mediterranean. In the reign of James VI, mention is made of Scottish ships having sailed to the Azores and Canaries, but few merchants and skippers in those days ventured as far as the ports of the

* *Privy Council Register*. Vol. XII, p. 439.

† *History of Shipmasters' Society*. Alex. Clark. P. 22.

Mediterranean. Twenty years later, one learns that three Scottish ships and their cargoes were confiscated at Malaga for carrying thither certain Dutch commodities.* Aberdeen merchants and seamen, who were abreast of the times, succeeded in opening up trade between their native town and the distant city of Livorno or Leghorn. The Crown issued to Scottish traders Mediterranean passes or safe-conducts, as required by the articles of peace between England and the Barbary States. Among the recipients of these passes was Thomas Gordon, master of the "Margaret" of Aberdeen, who from the year 1688 onwards, was in the habit of voyaging regularly to the Mediterranean.†

To Aberdeen also belongs the honour of being the Scottish pioneer of trade in the New World. In England's rapidly-increasing trade with the American plantations Scotland had no part, and prior to 1660 only one Scotsman was bold enough to seek commercial prosperity in the new colonies. This was John Burnet of Aberdeen, who sailed with goods to Virginia, and shipped tobacco in exchange. An order of 1637 that all Virginian tobacco must be imported at London was likely to prove a serious handicap to the enterprising Aberdonian, but Charles I had no desire to limit the commercial freedom of Scotland, and his liberal policy permitted Burnet and any other adventurous Scot who cared to follow his example to sail unhampered to and from America.‡

The benefits to Scottish-American trade which Charles I's far-sighted policy conferred were lost by the

* *Annals of Commerce*. Vol. II, pp. 190, 326.

† *The Old Scots Navy*. James Grant, LL.B. P. 51.

‡ *Commercial Relations between Scotland and England*. Theodora Keith. P. 45.

Navigation Act. England, preferring to reap what she had sown, refused all concessions to the Scots, and the latter realised they must either abandon all intercourse with America or carry on trade in defiance of England's prohibitions. From 1670 onwards illegal trading gradually increased to a considerable volume, and though Glasgow, which owed its rise to its connection with America, claimed the bulk of the trade, vessels sailed also from Leith and Aberdeen, carrying from the latter, principally, cargoes of woollen goods.*

At the close of the century, Aberdeen joined in the venture to develop trade with Africa and the East Indies. The African Company was established in Scotland under an Act of Parliament, and held out bright prospects of extensive trade and territorial power. The Aberdeen magistrates subscribed £300 stg. on behalf of the community, but the opposition from England and discouragement from the King soon resulted in the dissolution of the Company, and financial loss to the shareholders. On the passing of the treaty of Union in 1707, an indemnity was granted to the Company in compensation for its heavy losses, and Aberdeen received its proportion of the money which had been sunk in the enterprise.†

Of the various commodities on which the export trade of Aberdeen depended, salmon, as in previous years, was one of the most important. The fish were caught in great abundance in the local rivers, the Dee and the Don, and in favourable seasons produced over 1,400 barrels, each weighing 250 pounds. The magistrates paid particular attention to the curing and preparing of the salmon

* *Commercial Relations between Scotland and England.* p. 118.

† *Aberdeen Council Register* (MSS.). Vol. LVII, p. 524; vol. LVIII, pp. 71-75.

for exportation. A "visitor" was appointed to examine all the barrels made by the coopers, to see that each was of the correct measure, i.e., $11\frac{1}{2}$ gallons.* In addition to supervising the salting and packing of the fish, the examiner marked the barrels with the letters ABD. before they were shipped. Fraudulent practices were thus prevented, and the article acquired a special fame in the foreign markets. The importance of the trade may be gauged by the fact that in July, 1619, the Provost of Aberdeen and one of the burgesses, in their capacity as Commissioners of the Burgh, produced in presence of the Lords of the Council double standards of their measure of salmon, according to the "auld gede and standart of Abirdene," sealed and marked with the town's stamp. One was sent to Edinburgh Castle, the other to Dumbarton to remain as warrant for the standard of salmon.†

The trade was largely dependent on the importation of foreign salt. The manufacture and export of salt was one of the most lucrative of Scottish industries, but the home product was not adapted for the curing of fish. Consequently when trade regulations under the Navigation Act forbade the importation of foreign salt, Scottish merchants, and more particularly Aberdeen fish-curers, were loud in their protests. In November, 1671, Andrew Skene petitioned the Lords of Council and Exchequer on behalf of the heritors of the salmon fishing to grant them liberty to freight abroad a ship with sufficient bay and foreign salt to cure the salmon. Provost Milne of Linlithgow and others heard the petition, and informed the magistrates of Aberdeen that a ship from Nantes, loaded with salt, would deliver a

* *Aberdeen Burgh Records* (Spalding Club). Vol. I, p. 360.

† *Privy Council Register*. Vol. XI, pp. 526-7.

quantity at the port on payment of £4 6s. 8d. per boll. The Town Council was required to give security that the salt would be used solely for curing salmon for foreign export. The contract was not kept, and the following April a further appeal was made. In July the Lords of the Treasury granted a licence to the heritors of the salmon fishing to import 1,200 bolls of bay salt annually.* It is presumed the agreement was carried out.

In the early thirties a new invention was discovered for the manufacture of salt, which greatly improved the quality, and increased the amount turned out by the same consumption of fuel. The inventors were given a monopoly for three years, and a proposal was made to limit the export of Scottish salt into England. But objections were raised from many quarters. The coal and salt industries were closely connected, and a big diminution in the production of salt would result in a substantial decrease in the output of coal. As half the shipping of the kingdom depended on the export of these commodities, the carrying trade was in danger of suffering severely.

Occasions arose, however, when the authorities were only too glad to sanction the exportation of salt. One such occurred when an Aberdeen merchant received from Newhaven a quantity of salt which was pronounced to be both insufficient and unwholesome. On giving a bond of £100 to the Lord Protector as surety that the salt would not be used in the British Isles, the merchant was allowed to export the cargo to foreign parts.†

Salmon was almost the only kind of fish exported

* *Letters received by Burgh of Aberdeen* (MSS.). Vol. V, Nos. 41, 53, 59, 76, 81.

† *Ibid.* Vol. III, No. 275.

from Aberdeen at that time. The herring trade, for which Aberdeen became famous in a later era, was then almost non-existent. Few herrings were caught by Scottish fishermen, except in the western sea-lochs, and the industry, which even then might have proved a lucrative one to the east coast towns, was entirely in the hands of the Dutch, who for centuries had prosecuted herring fishing off the Scottish coasts. The Government and local authorities endeavoured to stimulate healthy competition. In 1612 the Aberdeen magistrates purchased a completely equipped fishing vessel in Holland and engaged a Dutch skipper to train the Aberdonians in the art of catching and curing the fish, but the scheme evidently collapsed, as nothing more was heard of it.* The Dutch still retained the monopoly, and their fleets of busses at work daily within sight of the shore were a continual reproach to the citizens for their lack of enterprise. Even some of the fishing boats belonging to the town were manned by Dutchmen, who were granted rights as citizens and admitted to the burgess roll.† The "Hollanders" were not suffered gladly, and from time to time the Scottish seaports and fishing communities from Shetland to Dunbar protested against the intolerable encroachments of the fishermen from the Low Countries.

Another commodity for which Aberdeen acquired fame was pork. Unequaled both for its quality and the skill of the coopers in salting it for exportation, it was shipped in large quantities to Holland, France and Spain. An extensive industry was carried on in the town, the goods finding a ready market at Campvere for the victualling of Dutch ships. ‡

* *History of Aberdeen and Banff*. Wm. Watt. P. 336.

† *Letters received by Burgh*. Vol. I, No. 120.

‡ *Annals of Aberdeen*. Vol. I, p. 260.

Skins were also exported on a comparatively large scale. In May, 1617, two small barques carried from the port 8,000 lamb skins, and in 1650, no fewer than 30,000 were shipped to Danzig by one merchant alone. To the old articles of export were added knitted woollen goods, while the art of weaving taught by the Flemings had made good progress, as evidenced in the extensive manufacture of textile fabrics during the period. The Convention of Burghs did everything to encourage the industry, bringing from England, Flanders, and France experts in converting the raw material into plaidings, broadcloth, grograms, flemmings, serges.* Aberdeen was unrivalled in the manufacture of cloth, and it was stated that "plaidings were made hereabout in greater plenty than in any other place of the nation whatsoever."† In May, 1617, Alexander Ramsay, Robert Fiddes and Patrick Findlay, three Aberdeen skippers, sailed from the port with cargoes of plaidings and woolskins. About 24,000 ells of plaiding were shipped to Flanders,‡ and in 1650 the quantity exported to Campvere and Danzig amounted to 73,538 ells. An additional stimulus was given to the trade by the temporary demand made by the Dutch West Indian Companies for their plantations in Brazil.

Disputes arose from time to time concerning the exportation of wool. The difficulty lay in the fact that the port engaged in a lucrative trade with Flanders in the export of the raw material, while later, with the development of home manufacture, the demand for the

* *Annals of Aberdeen*, p. 260.

† *Report by Thomas Tucker upon Settlement of Revenue of Excise and Customs in Scotland* (Miscellany of Scottish Burgh Records Society), p. 23.

‡ *Ledger of Andrew Halyburton*, p. xcvi.

raw material at home greatly increased. In January, 1623, a meeting of nobility, barons, and burghs was held at Edinburgh to discuss the King's proposal that the exportation of Scots wool should be limited entirely to England. The wool growers protested that since the home demand was insignificant they would be ruined. The provost of Aberdeen, acting as the burgh's commissioner, voted against its exportation to England as tending to the decay of Flanders.* At a much later date (1693) the chief cause of complaint lay in lack of restricting the export. The Aberdeen manufacturers stated they had difficulty in securing a sufficient supply of wool, and owing to unlimited exportation abroad, the output of woollen goods suffered both in quantity and quality.†

During the interval, the Navigation Act of 1651 had proved very detrimental to the interests of Scottish trade in general, since it forbade the importation of goods into the country except in native ships or ships belonging to the country whence the goods were brought. The shipping of Aberdeen and other Scottish ports had become so depleted through war and its consequences that trade could not be pursued without the aid of foreign ships, and the burghs begged to be allowed to transport their coal and salt in foreign ships and import goods, e.g., foreign salt for fishcuring, from France and Spain. The export of wool was forbidden, likewise the importation of many articles for which Scottish merchants had for centuries found a ready sale. French wines and spirits, and later "all foreign silk and cotton goods, except goods of India and Persia, imported in the ships

* *Letters received by Burgh of Aberdeen.* Vol. I, Nos. 200-201.

† *Commercial Relations between England and Scotland*, p. 82.

of the Company of Scotland trading to Africa and the Indies," came under this category.* Aberdeen suffered considerably, as she carried on a lucrative trade in the exchange of her salmon and plaidings for wines from Bordeaux. Cases of evading the Act were frequent.

In December, 1680, an action was raised before the Privy Council against two of the sub-collectors of Customs at Aberdeen at the instance of the Lord Advocate, the agent for the Royal Burghs, and the magistrates of the town. Their illegal procedure consisted in exporting cargoes of salmon and herrings to France and the Low Countries, and importing in return wines, brandy, bay salt, paper, and other forbidden articles. †

Owing to the numerous national and international upheavals throughout the century, merchants and traders were faced with many difficulties in the pursuit of their occupation. Aberdeen's commercial problems were, with those of other burghs, the subject of discussion at Conventions, or were brought to the notice of Parliament by specially appointed Commissioners.

The need for convoys to protect their merchant ships, the heavy burden of taxation—£12 Scots was levied upon the boll of foreign salt, and the custom on plaidings was exorbitant—the free exportation of wool, the circulation of Spanish and French coins in Scotland, the need for a uniform system of weights and measures, the heavy tonnage dues levied on ships trading to France, ‡ were all questions which closely affected the interests of the trading community of Aberdeen.

* *The King's Customs*. H. Atton and H. H. Holland. Vol. I, p. 162.

† *Letters Received*. Vol. XI, No. 167.

‡ *Ibid.* Vol. II, No. 41; Vol. III, Nos. 134, 181; Vol. VI, No. 29.

Ever-recurrent was the problem of preserving the privileges of royal burghs. Non-royal burghs were becoming impatient of the regulations restricting the export of Staple commodities to the burghs royal, and in all the burghs unfreemen were claiming the privileges which belonged legally to freemen only.

In 1662 the Aberdeen Commissioner to a Scottish Parliament, summoned to discuss the advancement of trade, pointed out that Fraserburgh, though only a burgh of barony, was trading in Staple goods. Twenty years later the Lords of Exchequer were again petitioned by Aberdeen that goods should be exported to and imported from ports and harbours belonging to royal burghs.

A question of still greater moment was that of the Staple port. The Scottish burghs, and Aberdeen in particular, had in the previous century shown themselves averse to trade limitations, and as time went on it became increasingly difficult to confine the export of home commodities to one Staple port in foreign countries. Campvere continued to be the Staple port for Scottish trade in the Netherlands, but the relations existing between that town and the Scottish ports in the seventeenth century were a clear indication of the fact that Scotland was breaking away from mediæval economic conditions. "Under the changing conditions of trade," says Professor Hume Brown, "the maintenance of the Staple was becoming an anachronism and ceasing to be in the interests of either contracting party."

Early in the century, Campvere complained that the Staple was not being properly observed, and that Scottish ships discharged their cargoes at other ports in the Low Countries. The contract was ratified in 1608, and its terms rigidly enforced by the Scottish burghs. The

Conventions contain many instances of punishment meted out to those guilty of a breach of the Staple. But it was sometimes difficult to prove a merchant guilty of this offence. In 1616 John Short of Aberdeen was charged with having sold his goods in Holland instead of carrying them to Campvere. He stated that he had intended sailing to Zealand, but, being prevented by bad weather, and fearing his goods would be damaged by the delay, he got rid of them in Holland.* Another offender was Patrick Stewart, who in 1626 transported Staple wares to Rotterdam, contrary to the tenor of the contract. He confessed to the charge, was fined £40, and ordered to pay double the usual dues.†

Aberdeen had no fault to find with Campvere, providing her trade was not limited to that port. Indeed, when for a short period the Staple was removed to Dorte, and when, despite the contract with that city a large proportion of Scottish trade was attracted to Rotterdam, Aberdeen, supported by Montrose and Kinghorn, protested against both those towns on account of their "inconveniences."‡ The question of transferring the Staple was raised from time to time, but Aberdeen was foremost in objecting to the alteration of existing conditions. Doubtless the burgh's chief reason lay in the fear that Campvere, if shorn of her position, might retaliate by seizing the goods of Scottish merchants lying at the port, a large proportion of which belonged to Aberdeen.

Yet some of her merchants and skippers continued to carry their goods elsewhere. Three of the transgressors were Robert and William Gerrard and Andrew Mitchell.

* *Records of Convention of Royal Burghs.* Vol. III, p. 8.

† *Ibid.* Vol. III, p. 247.

‡ *The Scottish Staple at Veere*, p. 226.

The Conservator offered the merchants two-thirds the value of the goods, provided they would bring them to the Staple port, but having received no orders from home, they refused. The Conservator wrote to the magistrates, therefore, advising them to grant the necessary permission. Some years later (1678) he again appealed to the municipal authorities, enjoining them to give serious consideration to "the merchants and seamen of this country who still continue to divert the trade from the Staple port to Rotterdam, Amsterdam, and other places of the United Provinces, to the great prejudice of the nation."*

In the seventeenth century, a large part of Aberdeen's carrying-trade was done by ships of other countries. The shipping belonging to the port was inconsiderable; in fact, judged by present-day standards, almost negligible. The tonnage of vessels was very small, a ship of 100 tons being a rare exception. In 1626 the port possessed only 10 barques averaging about 40, and none exceeding 60 tons burden. All of these were not seaworthy; two were old ships lying in disuse for lack of mariners and baiting, and "The Gift of God," which sailed to Norway, was in bad repair and "leaked at a full sea."† A very gloomy picture of the state of trade and shipping at the port was painted by the Commissioners to the Convention of Burghs in 1635. Commerce with Flanders had suffered, it was said, through competition with Montrose, Brechin, and Inverness. Aberdeen had no trade with France except in salmon, and none with Stockholm, Spain, and England. All traffic with Norway had been abandoned for want of shipping, and seven at least of the Scottish seaports were in a more

* *Letters received by Burgh.* Vol. VI, No. 58.

† *Privy Council Register.* Vol. I (1625-27), p. 669.

flourishing condition. But as the Commissioners were appealing for a substantial reduction of taxation, they doubtless exaggerated the situation. Bad as matters then were, they were infinitely worse in the later years of the century. In 1656 the port owned nine vessels, the joint burden of the whole (ranging from 20 to 80 tons) being 310 tons.* In 1692 Aberdeen's entire shipping consisted of two galliots of 30 tons each.

A glance at the ships entering and leaving the harbour in those days is sufficient testimony of the town's close association with, and dependence on, Holland. The Dutch cargo vessel or "galliot," resembling a ketch with flat bottom, rounded ribs, and distinctive mainsail enormously long at the foot and extremely short at the head, the "dogger" with its main and mizzen mast, the two-masted herring busses, the "pink" with its narrow stern—these, together with their humbler brethren the hoy, the lighter, and the cabar—the "crear" of a later day—were all familiar to the seafaring community of Aberdeen. The condition of the harbour in the seventeenth century necessitated the use of lighters for the loading and unloading of ships. These were in use till near the end of the eighteenth century, when harbour improvements, by allowing ships of greater tonnage to lie close to the quays, rendered the lighters unnecessary.†

During the period in question, the municipal authorities did much for the benefit of shipping at the port by sundry harbour improvements. In 1607 a pier was commenced on the south side of the channel. It was a somewhat primitive erection constructed of stones without cement, and large stakes of timber. The work

* *Tucker's Report*, p. 23.

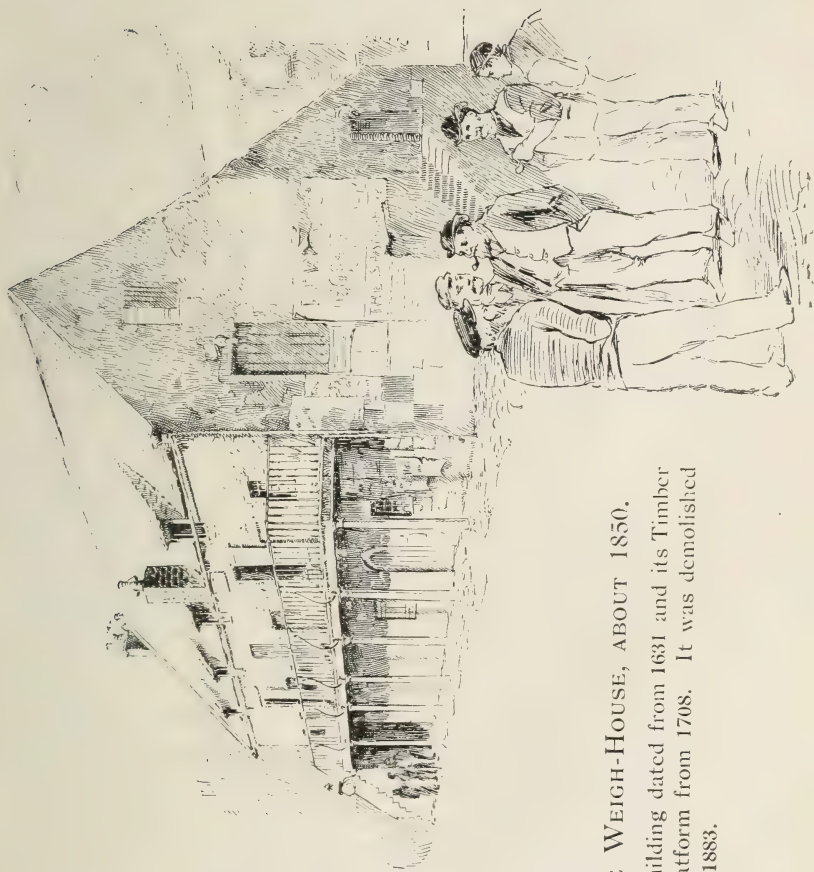
† *History of the Shipmasters' Society*, p. 13.

occupied three years, and was done mainly by the inhabitants of the town to the sound of the bagpipes and drum, but when completed, it increased the security of the harbour. Two corn mills were built within the flood-mark in 1621, and later a Pack-house or Weigh-house, which served also as a Custom-house. The extension of the wharf eastward from the quay-head was commenced in 1623, and carried on by slow degrees, and through the many interruptions of foreign and civil wars, till its completion in 1659. The harbour was at that time very difficult and dangerous of access owing to the presence of a sand bar across the entrance. At low tide, there were scarcely two feet of water, and at spring tides never more than fifteen. Floods choking the entrance rendered the harbour insecure. On occasion the water overflowed the quays, and, sweeping the ships from their moorings, carried them out to sea.*

Tucker, in his report (1656), gives the clearest picture of the harbour as it then was. "The widenesse of the place from the inlett of the sea coming in with a narrowe winding gut and beateing in store of sand with its waves hath rendered it somewhat shallowe in a great part of it and so less usefull of late than formerly. But the inhabitants are remedyeing this inconveniencye by lengthning theyr key and bringing it up close to a neck of land, which jetting out eastward, towards an headland lyeing before it, makes the comeing in soe streight. At the end of which foremost neck of land there is a little village called Footie and at the other headland another called Torye."† All men-of-war and the bigger craft had to lie in the river channel at Torry. Smaller vessels were able to go as far as Footdee, or, when the tide

* *The Book of Bon-Accord*, pp. 279, 283.

† *Tucker's Report*, p. 23.



THE WEIGH-HOUSE, ABOUT 1850.

This Building dated from 1631 and its Timber Platform from 1708. It was demolished in 1883.

was full, as far as the side of the pier. In 1676 the land between Pocra and the river was altered to allow the latter to overflow into Pocra.*

A few years later (1682) the magistrates asked the Privy Council for a warrant to raise a voluntary contribution for further reconstruction. At the close of the century an Act was passed for building a new bulwark towards the east and repairing and straightening the old one. A ship was sent to Hamburg to carry home timber for the work.†

Shipbuilding on a diminutive scale was begun in this era. Alexander Davidson, a timber merchant in St. Andrews, requested permission, in 1606, to build a bark in the churchyard of Trinity Friars. The Wood of Drum was bought for the purpose, and the timber was floated down the river. The Council gave their sanction, but the churchyard, which apparently was used as a dumping ground by the neighbourhood, had first to be cleared. The magistrates ordered all persons concerned to remove the refuse under penalty of a fine of 5 marks.‡ No mention is made of any other ship having been built in the churchyard, but some time later a dock for building and repairing ships was constructed at Footdee.

The erection of the Custom House was followed by the appointment of a staff to collect the customs and prevent fraud. The proximity of Torry and Footdee to the mouth of the harbour, where ships generally anchored, gave ample opportunity for the landing of goods privately. In addition to a collector and "cheque," the port employed three waiters, who kept watch at the little hamlets in rotation, to prevent the fraudulent landing of cargoes.

* *Aberdeen Council Register* (MSS.). Vol. LVI, p. 152.

† *Ibid.* Vol. LVII, p. 692.

‡ *Aberdeen Burgh Records* (Spalding Club). Vol. II, p. 280.

During this period the white fishers of "Futtie"* seem to have caused the municipal authorities more trouble than any other section of the community. They neglected their occupation, interfered with the ships, defrauded the customs, quarrelled among themselves respecting their fishing rights, and were a continual source of disturbance to the neighbourhood. Their neglect of duty led to the imposition of a fine on all who refused to go to sea in good weather.† Severe punishment was meted out to those found guilty of maliciously cutting the ropes of vessels lying in the harbour. The malefactors were tied to a stake within the flood-mark for three hours, then scourged, and subsequently banished from the town. Their neglect of Sunday observance was another offence, and the white fishers were ordered to abstain from selling fish on that day and to attend public worship. Owners of boats were required to pay to the tacksman the teind of all fish taken, and measures were passed preventing disputes among the fishers concerning their fishing rights.‡

In view of the rapid decrease in shipping and seamen, caused by warfare and piracy, the Scottish seaports could ill afford to sustain further losses through the ravages of plague. Consequently one finds that numerous precautionary measures were adopted by the Privy Council and local authorities to prevent the spread of the disease. Their methods are exemplified by the measures passed in 1664 by the Privy Council, prohibiting all trade and commerce with the United Provinces where the

* "Futtie" is more correct than Footdee, the name being derived from Fotin, a patron saint. Situated at the foot or mouth of the river Dee, it has erroneously been named Footdee.

† *Aberdeen Burgh Records* (Spalding Club). Vol. II, p. 70.

‡ *Ibid.* Vol. II, pp. 209, 210, 216-18.

plague was raging. No merchant, skipper, or seaman was permitted to load any vessel destined for any of the Dutch ports, nor could goods be imported thence after 1st August, 1664. All ships already loaded in Holland and on the homeward voyage were compelled to lie outside the harbours of the ports for which they were bound. No goods were to be unloaded or sold nor any of the crew put ashore without municipal authority, and all seamen, pilots, and fishermen were forbidden to board the suspect ships without warrant under pain of fine, imprisonment and forfeiture of boats. Guards were appointed to prevent the breach of these laws.*

Precautionary measures sometimes involved the local authorities in difficulties. For instance, in 1669, owing to the rumours of plague in Holland, a ship arriving at Aberdeen from that country *via* France was ordered by the magistrates to remain some days in harbour before discharging the cargo. By reason of the delay in unloading, the magistrates were accused of attempting to embezzle the goods, and wrote to two of their colleagues then in Edinburgh requesting that the matter should be fairly represented to the Convention of Burghs.†

* *Privy Council Register*. Vol. I (1661-4), pp. 561-2.

† *Letters received by Burgh*. Vol. IV, No. 295.

CHAPTER IV

ABERDEEN AND THE WARS OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

THE great obstruction to trade in the seventeenth century was the long series of wars in which Britain was involved—wars with Spain, Holland, France, and most disastrous of all, the Civil War. By reason of its prominent position as one of the leading seaports on the east coast of Scotland, Aberdeen naturally played an important part in the maritime history of the period.

It has been observed how closely it was associated with the menace of a Spanish invasion in the latter part of the sixteenth century. With the opening years of the seventeenth, the town was at times unpleasantly aware of a foreign policy which favoured friendship with Spain at all costs. James I, in his anxiety to procure a matrimonial alliance between the two countries, was content to propitiate Spain in any manner not too openly compromising. His zeal was indicated in different ways. Scottish levies had been raised on behalf of the Protestant Cause in the Palatinate, but the King permitted the apostate Earl of Argyle and his agents to employ the levies in the cause of Catholicism in the Netherlands. Agents were established in Scotland to work on behalf of Spain, and William Laing, a Scottish merchant living in Aberdeen, was subsidised by the Spanish ambassador, Don Carlos Colonia, to promote the interests of Spanish trading vessels arriving at the port. The inhabitants were ordered to abstain from molesting him and his

family, but Laing was not a *persona grata* in Aberdeen, and being prejudiced in favour of Spain, he was regarded with suspicion and distrust by other foreigners coming to the town.

Spain and Holland, age-long enemies, both counted on the friendship of Britain, and one of the chief difficulties with which local authorities had to contend was the judicious treatment of Spanish and Dutch vessels lying side by side in Scottish harbours. Orders were issued by the Privy Council to prevent incivility to the crews of such vessels lying at Aberdeen and Leith, and copies of a royal letter prescribing the mode of dealing with ships of war were circulated. The captains of the "wauchter ships" were ordered to deliver the sails to the provost and baillies of the town, and it was agreed that the Spanish or Dutch ship which arrived first in harbour was to have the privilege of two tides for its safe departure.*

In 1623, two Spanish freebooters plying up and down the northern coast were chased by Dutch men-of-war, and took refuge, the one in Leith, the other in Aberdeen, where they were besieged by the "Hollanders." The King instructed the Dutch Ambassador to arrange for the withdrawal of his country's ships and to permit the Spanish vessels a free and unmolested passage. Mediation was made both at home and in Holland on behalf of the Spanish ships, and the Dutch were informed that failure of peaceful means would result in the adoption of more violent remedies, for which the onus of blame would rest on the Netherlands. But Prince Maurice of Orange protested that acquiescence in the King's demands would involve the ruin of his country. He pointed out that the right of free entrance to and

* *Privy Council Register*. Vol. XIII (1622-5), pp. 134-6.

egress from British harbours, once granted to Spanish ships, would be extended to the ports of France and Denmark. The King of Spain would thus be enabled to use these harbours as a base for his ships to prey on the merchant and fishing fleets of Holland. The Spanish freebooters, moreover, would be under no compulsion to return to Ostend and Dunkirk, before which the Dutch men-of-war lay, but could pass from port to port of the King's dominions and of France and Denmark, selling their prizes and ransoming their prisoners. The Prince suggested that if His Majesty disliked acts of hostility resulting from the close proximity of Spanish and Dutch men-of-war within the havens of Britain, he should forbid entrance to both. Negotiations were protracted, but eventually the Prince of Orange agreed to give way in the case of the two ships in question.* A herald was sent on board the Dutch warship lying in Aberdeen harbour, commanding the captain to loose the cables and ropes fastened above those of the Spanish ship and fix them underneath, to permit the latter to set sail, and to give no pursuit until the ship was in the open sea. The Dutch captain complied with the orders, disclaiming any intention of evil against the Spanish vessel. He believed that William Laing had misrepresented the case.† The Spanish ship was convoyed by one of H.M. ships as far as the Dutch fleet, and assurance was given by the States that they would allow it to pass unmolested into Dunkirk.

The "wauchter" ships were regarded with marked disfavour by the Scottish seaports, not without good reason. In November, 1622, the "Gift of God," a Banff barque lying in Leith, was on the point of sailing

* *Stowe MSS.* (British Museum) 133. Vol. II.

† *Privy Council Register.* Vol. XIII, pp. 791-2.

for the north with goods belonging to several Aberdeen merchants and others. Ordered to strike sail by John Jansen, captain of a warship in Leith, and refusing to obey, the barque was held up, seized and damaged, the crew assaulted, and the goods ransacked. The skipper sued for damages to the ship and freight, valued at £20,000 Scots. Whereupon the Council ordered the defendant to restore the vessel and cargo in good condition, and give redress for the loss of the voyage and goods destroyed.*

The following month a similar incident took place in the roads outside Aberdeen harbour. While waiting the tide, a barque laden with goods from London was boarded by the captains and a number of the crew of the "wauchter" ships. Armed with muskets and pikes, they made short work of the defenders, and guarded the ship all night until the entire cargo had been removed. The skipper was forced to hand over the ship's cocket under pain of death. The magistrates demanded the surrender of the goods and cocket, but the captains refused, and were consequently denounced as rebels. They were charged to appear before the Privy Council on 15th February, 1623, to receive orders anent the preservation of peace in the kingdom.†

It was not to be expected that the citizens would view such procedure with calmness, and by some at least revenge against the Spanish ships was contemplated. Anthony Rotashe, captain of a Spanish warship, complained that a conspiracy to poison him and his crew had been hatched by a number of Aberdonians. David Kemp, a baxter in the town, having undertaken to supply the ship with bread, was urged by certain persons

* *Privy Council Register*. Vol. XIII, pp. 93-4.

† *Ibid.* p. 131.

to add poison to the ingredients. Kemp refused to participate in the plot, and further revealed the substance of it to Rotashe, warning him to be on his guard, but refusing to disclose the names of the plotters. The Privy Council, to whom the captain appealed, ordered the magistrates to examine Kemp concerning the time, place, circumstances and conditions offered. The results of the examination, however, are not known.*

Within the next few years, England's policy towards Spain had undergone a change, and in 1626 the two countries entered the Thirty Years' War as enemies. With the Spanish Netherlands and Dunkirk as a base of operations, the Spaniards preyed on English and Scottish shipping, and Scotland, with no naval force of her own to safeguard her merchantmen, suffered heavy losses. The burghs were ordered by the Privy Council to report on the number of ships available for the defence of the east coast in the event of a Spanish invasion. In view of reported preparations on the enemy's part, the King was fitting out two English fleets, one for an expedition to Spain, the other for the defence of the island and for sweeping the seas of the enemy. Spain's attention was directed towards Scotland, where it was stated a party favourable to that country still flourished. The King therefore required the Council to take steps for the security of the Scottish coasts, and to levy 500 able seamen to be drafted into one or other of the English fleets. Thus was commenced, through the medium of the Privy Council, the practice of levying Scottish mariners to assist in manning the English navy. In accordance with instructions, the Council ordered the detention of all ships in Scottish harbours provided with munition or ordnance,†

* *Privy Council Register*. Vol. XIII, pp. 169-70.

† *Ibid.* Vol. I (1625-27), pp. 333-6.

The Commissioners of the burghs pointed out the impossibility of supplying either the ships or mariners thought necessary for the defence of the country. The best of their ships were sold; the others were at sea on distant voyages, and the few remaining were small barques possessing no war equipment. Aberdeen (as we have seen) had only ten ships in 1626, three of which were at sea and three in bad repair. The "Bon-Accord" alone carried ordnance, consisting of two "taliones." The town could muster only 50 mariners, 40 being natives and 10 hired from other ports.*

The following year another call was made for Scottish vessels, for employment, it was thought, in Buckingham's naval expedition to Rochelle. An Act of Council commanded that no owners, masters or mariners of ships should put to sea without a special licence under penalty of death. Beacons were placed along the coast "for the better discoverie of ane forraine power and forces whilk sall happen to arrive," and the burghs were ordered to take an inventory of their stores of gunpowder and ordnance. In September, 1627, the magistrates of Aberdeen lodged a petition against a skipper named Thomson for transporting certain pieces of ordnance to Leith. Later, the master of ordnance, by warrant of the King, delivered to Aberdeen "six good and sufficient demi-culverins" for the fortification of the harbour.†

If Aberdeen could do little in the way of naval equipment, she was on occasion called upon to lend financial help towards the maintenance of ships of war. The "Thistle," one of the King's ships, was damaged and driven into the harbour by stress of weather on its return

* *Privy Council Register*. Vol. I (1625-27), p. 669.

† *Letters received by Burgh of Aberdeen*. Vol. I, No. 241.

from England in 1628. The captain appealed to the Privy Council, who in turn ordered the magistrates to furnish the ship with victuals and other necessaries, supply a proper guard, remove the sails, dismiss the greater part of the crew should the "Thistle" be detained by contrary winds, expedite its departure for Leith whenever possible, and pay the expenses incurred. These were to be refunded, but three months later the magistrates had not recovered the 1,300 marks lent to the captain of the "Thistle," and as in January, 1629, they made a further appeal to the Chancellor of Scotland, it is questionable whether the money was ever refunded.*

During the Civil War, the trade and shipping of the port suffered greatly. Aberdeen and other Scottish craft sailing to and from Holland and France were seized by English ships, valuable cargoes confiscated, and the crews subjected to cruel treatment. Other vessels fortunate enough to reach port in safety were immediately commandeered to transport provisions to the army at Newcastle. Engagements off the Aberdeenshire coast between merchant vessels and English privateers and men-of-war occurred frequently, and some of the ships lying in port were commandeered and hastily equipped to beat off the enemy. An Aberdeen barque in 1651 was chased by English ships on to the sands under the Broad Hill, and the whole town was in arms to resist the enemy.†

Some of the Aberdeen skippers played a bold and romantic part during that troublesome period. One of these was John Strachan, who, in 1642, was placed in command of one of the King's yachts to convoy the

* *Letters received by Burgh of Aberdeen.* Vol. I, No. 272.

† *Aberdeen Records* (Scot. Burgh Rec. Soc.). Vol. II, p. 120.

Queen to Holland and attend her service. Parliament forbade his return, and when Strachan, in obedience to the King's orders defied the edict, four ships were sent to lie in wait for the rebel. He successfully engaged two of them in the open sea, but on the appearance of the others, took to flight and, having run his vessel aground on the English coast, he turned his guns on the enemy. Reinforcements arrived, and the enemy was driven off.*

In the opportunities afforded them to carry royalist fugitives abroad, skippers were faced with a temptation to which not a few succumbed. One of the offenders, potential if not actual, was William Walker, master of the "John of Aberdeen," which sailed regularly to Holland. In September, 1642, he was summoned before the Provost and Council, and ordered to carry no person out of the kingdom without special licence under penalty of a fine of 500 marks, and was obliged to give a full list of all who boarded his ship.†

Two years later the port was the scene of another exciting incident of the war. Scottish ships were not the only legitimate spoil of the English, for by virtue of letters of marque, certain English vessels preyed upon Danish and Irish shipping as well. In 1644 a Danish barque, laden with herring, was captured by one of these privateers, and, as was the custom, an exchange was made among the crews, certain Englishmen being placed in the Danish vessel and *vice versa*. The latter, having become separated from its captor and arriving in the road of Aberdeen, was brought into harbour by Major Nathaniel Gordon, whereupon the Englishmen on board were seized and lodged in the Tolbooth. The privateer meantime discovered the loss of her prize, and,

* *History of Shipmasters' Society*, p. 18.

† *Aberdeen Records* (Scot. Burgh Rec. Soc.). Vol. I, p. 292.

coming to Aberdeen, set ashore the pilot and skipper to learn its whereabouts. These two men were likewise apprehended, though, as it transpired, they had no share in the capture of the Danish vessel, but were seamen belonging to another Parliamentary ship. Their colleagues took revenge by retaliating on Aberdeen fishing boats. Several were captured, others were chased into port or scattered to the north by the Parliament ship. A number of the crew landed near Belhelvie, and raiding the district, carried aboard a large supply of malt, etc. The ship anchored in the road, fired on the town, and kept as hostages all fishermen whom it succeeded in capturing. It was hoped that a ransom might have been secured for the two Englishmen, but the seizure of the Aberdeen fishermen negatived the idea of reward. On the solicitations of the fisher-folk, James Brown, an Aberdeen skipper, was sent on board the Parliamentary ship with a letter from the prisoners requesting that the fishermen and the stolen malt be sent ashore, but that Skipper Brown be kept as hostage till they themselves were liberated and had rejoined their ship. The matter was arranged to the satisfaction of both, and the Parliamentary ship sailed from the vicinity.

But the incident was not closed. The English privateer having discovered in the interval the whereabouts of the Danish prize, promptly seized the first Aberdeen vessel that came her way—a barque from Caithness with a valuable cargo of tallow, salt-beef, skins, hides, etc. The master was treated with the utmost indignity and harshness. The pirate appeared in the roads of Aberdeen, to the complete demoralisation of the fishing fleet, and sent two emissaries ashore with the information that, provided the English prisoners were

released, the privateer was content to keep her present prize instead of the Danish ship. The inhabitants reluctantly agreed, and an exchange of hostages was made. But Skipper Walker was carried off to sea by the pirate.

The town fared badly in the transaction. The Danish herring vessel, which she had virtually bought with her own more valuable ship and cargo, was returned to its lawful owners in Denmark, together with the residue of the cargo not sold by Major Gordon.*

The magistrates at times found it advisable to adopt a *laissez-faire* policy, especially where Scottish ships were concerned. In September, 1651, a Scottish royalist man-of-war, being apparently harassed by ships of the Commonwealth, fled into Aberdeen harbour for safety and support. Orders were sent for the ship to be yielded up. The magistrates replied they would not deliver the ship, neither would they give protection to the crews of vessels sent to seize her, but Commonwealth ships might come and arrest her at their own risk. When these arrived, they found the man-of-war deserted, but she had considerable stores of ammunition, etc., and six pieces of ordnance.† Another Aberdeen frigate mounted with two iron guns and one brass was captured. The skipper, John Muir, appealed to the Privy Council after the Restoration for the delivery of the guns. The latter ordered Major-General Morgan to deliver the guns to the petitioner when proof of his ownership was obtained.‡

If the Privy Council advocated the restoration of

* *Memorial of Troubles in Scotland and England*. J. Spalding. Vol. II, pp. 339-40.

† *Scotland and the Commonwealth* (Scot. Hist. Society), p. 326.

‡ *Privy Council Register*. Vol. I (1661-64), p. 102.

Scottish shipping seized by an enemy, it showed itself at times extremely dilatory in surrendering the ships of other countries. In 1658 the King of Portugal, then on friendly terms with Cromwell, granted letters of marque to a Captain Binning and others, instructing them to take action against Portugal's enemies, particularly the United Provinces. A frigate was rigged out, and ultimately two Dutch vessels bound for ports in France fell victims to it. The three vessels were driven by stress of weather into the harbours of Aberdeen and Stonehaven, from whence the Dutch crews were despatched to their own country. The ships had been captured subsequent to the Restoration, when Britain and the United Provinces were at peace, therefore the Dutch owners appealed to have the ships and cargoes restored. Considerable delay was entailed by the presentation of a petition from the captains of the privateers, and the Privy Council ordered the magistrates to secure the two ships, and intimate the fact to the Dutch skippers, until the matter was examined and reported to the King.

In March, 1662, Captain Binning appeared before the Council, reported as to the release of the Dutch crews, and declared that the cargoes had been stored in an Aberdeen warehouse by the command of the magistrates. An inventory of the goods contained no mention of money, tobacco, sail canvas, etc., which the Dutchmen also claimed. These, Captain Binning affirmed, had never existed. The continued delay in arriving at a settlement wore out the patience of the Dutch owners, who informed the Council that they would make no further effort to prove their case, but would await the King's decision in the matter.*

* *Privy Council Register.* Vol. I (1661-4), pp. 29-30, 58, 175-6.

The history of the port was next affected by the outbreak of war with Holland in 1665. Scottish trade had already suffered greatly by the abolition of free trade with England, but the war with Holland was more deadly, since for centuries Holland had been the main outlet for Scottish exports. The closing of Dutch ports was a calamity which affected the whole nation. As far as Aberdeen was concerned, measures to prevent invasion were promptly passed. The Privy Council ordered the repair of the blockhouse and the transference to it of four guns from John Annand's ship. All Dutch vessels, i.e., vessels belonging to the United Provinces, lying in harbour were to be seized and their rudders and sails removed. No merchant ships were to leave the harbour until convoys were provided.* Seamen were recruited for the King's service, and three Aberdeen burgesses were appointed to escort to Edinburgh the city's proportion of seamen—amounting to 14 in all. Even that small number was obtained with great difficulty. Though encouragement was given to enter the King's service, many able seamen left the town to avoid enlistment. The Town Council forfeited 500 marks for every man short, and consequently were driven to adopt stringent measures to secure the number required. They issued orders that all mariners who failed to appear before the magistrates on a stated day would be deprived of certain benefits they enjoyed, including the liberty of brewing within the burgh, and would be denounced as rebels. In spite of these measures, they failed to appear on the first occasion, and were given another opportunity. Apparently the threats had the desired effect, as the delivery at Edinburgh of the 14 seamen was subsequently reported. Two

* *Aberdeen Records* (Scot. Burgh Rec. Soc.). Vol. II, pp. 211, 214.

others, having undertaken to join the navy, escaped, but were apprehended and imprisoned, and pending trial they and their families were deprived of the above-mentioned privileges.*

One unwarrantable seizure of a vessel is recorded during this period. The "Fortune" of Leith, carrying a cargo of timber and tar from Bergen, was chased by a Dutch man-of-war, and fled to Stonehaven for safety. It fell into the hands of David Mader, the captain of a private man-of-war belonging to Sir Alex. Keith of Ludwharn. The goods were adjudged by the procurator before the Admiralty at Aberdeen as the prize of Keith. Thereupon the Edinburgh merchants who owned the cargo complained to the Privy Council, and the latter ordered the ship to be returned to Leith in good condition, failing which a fine of £600 stg. would be exacted.†

Throughout the latter half of the century the increasing need for sailors to man the navy was a constant menace to seamen who desired to pursue their calling in peace aboard their merchant craft or fishing boats. In 1672 a further levy was necessary to make up the complement of 500, but as soon as the sailors and fishers of Aberdeen heard of it, they put to sea. Warrants were issued for their apprehension, and Andrew Skene was commissioned by the magistrates "to search, seek and apprehend all seamen or sea fishermen belonging to this burgh or in service of the merchants thereof in whatsoever road, harbour or port the same can be found and to keep them in sure firmance."‡ An embargo was laid upon ships, with disastrous results to trade, and the authorities were the constant recipients of petitions from

* *Aberdeen Records* (Scot. Burgh Rec. Soc.). Vol. II, p. 215.

† *Privy Council Register*. Vol. II (1665-9), p. 190.

‡ *Letters received by Burgh*. Vol. V, Nos. 76, 81.

merchants and others who were unable to execute their orders. For example, in 1685 an Aberdeen merchant had bargained with the Earl of Errol to carry several hundred bolls of meal to Norway, but his ship was forbidden to sail. On appealing for permission to go to Norway, the Privy Council granted him authority to dispose of his cargo to the best advantage.

The work of virtual impressment continued, and in 1690, twenty seamen were conveyed from Aberdeen to Leith by certain of the magistrates. A Committee of the Privy Council met thereafter to discuss with the Provost of Aberdeen the safest method of transporting the men to Glasgow to serve in His Majesty's frigate under Captain Pottinger.

The need to provide adequate protection for the carrying trade of Scotland was at that period very urgent. In June, 1690, the combined Dutch and English fleets were defeated by the French at Beachy Head, and French privateering enterprise against England and Scotland was encouraged. The allied victory at La Hogue did not free the Scottish coasts from the French menace, and the destruction of their regular fleet drove the French to double their efforts in privateering. During the revolutionary period several Scotsmen gained undesirable prominence by their anxiety to forsake their country for a more lucrative career under the French flag. One of these, Alexander Smith, an Aberdonian, was prosecuted in December, 1693, by the Lord Advocate for alleged expressions against the Government, and for hiring a ship to sail as a French privateer against his own countrymen.

CHAPTER V

DEVELOPMENT OF THE PORT IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

SO far as the trend of trade is concerned, the main features of the eighteenth century were the opening up of new markets in Europe; the increase in the coasting trade; the decrease of trade with Holland as a result of the closer relations between the port and London; and the rapid growth of commerce with America.

At the close of the seventeenth century the shipping of Aberdeen comprised two vessels of 60 tons. At the opening of the nineteenth, the port possessed 150 ships of an aggregate tonnage of 17,130 tons. In 1788 63 Aberdeen vessels were employed in the foreign trade, about double the number in use in 1712.

Before the close of the century ships sailed from the port to most of the countries in Europe. Commodities of every class and variety were imported from and exported to Russia, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Prussia, Poland, Germany and Holland in the north, and Italy, Gibraltar, Spain, Portugal and France in the south of Europe. With some of these countries the port's trade in the course of eighty years was almost negligible. In the case of Germany and Spain, there was little or no increase; and so far as Holland, France and Italy were concerned, the period was marked by a decline in trade.

But ships to and from Norway, Sweden and Denmark were multiplied threefold, while the later years of the century showed an increasing development of trade with Russia.*

Aberdeen exported her Staple articles, salmon and other varieties of fish, pork, and woollen and linen manufactured goods. Her merchant ships and those of other Scottish and foreign ports sailed into harbour laden with wines from the Canaries, Bordeaux, Malaga, Oporto; cotton wool, liquorice, currants, fruit, nuts, chip-hats from Venice, Leghorn and Gibraltar; oil from Majorca; raisins from Alicante; twine, figs, lemons, oranges from Cadiz; cork from Barcelona; vinegar, sugar, prunes from Bilbao; apples from Bruges; paper, soap, muslins, calico from Rotterdam; timber, salt, pearl ashes from Bergen; silk, tow, onions and other goods from Campvere; wood and nankeens from Gottenburg; iron, flax, hemp, tallow, amber, starch from St. Petersburg and Danzig.

The following account of the merchandise, its quantity and species, exported from Aberdeen in 1712, gives an idea of her European trade at that period.†

To what Country exported.	No. of Vessels employed.	No. of Tons.	No. of Men.	Kinds and Quantities of Goods.
Norway ...	13 ...	406 ...	64 ...	{ 1,087 $\frac{3}{4}$ qrs. oatmeal. 1,501 ,, barley. 4 ,, pease. 951 $\frac{3}{8}$,, malt. 146 hundred 1 qr. and 500 cod and ling fish @ 6 score to the hundred. 7 trusses worsted stockings.

* *Statistics of Navigation* (Commerce and Revenue)—from Customs Books in Public Record Office.

† *Statistical Account of Scotland*. Vol. XIX, p. 203.

To what Country exported.	No. of Vessels employed.	No. of Tons.	No. of Men.	Kinds and Quantities of Goods.
Holland	6	238	38	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 479 barrels salmon. 17 hogshead tobacco. 359 one-half barrels pork. 104 trusses woollen cloth and worsted stockings. 10 casks hog-lard.
Portugal	2	85	14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 398 bars lead. 10 chaldrons coal. 12 trusses worsted stockings. 380 cod and ling fish. 373 barrels salmon.
Sweden	2	100	13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 18,690 cod and ling fish. 115³/₈ qrs. oatmeal. 197³/₈ ,, malt. 90 barrels herrings.
Spain	2	150	17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 69 one-half barrels salmon. 24,052 cod and ling fish. 31 parcels worsted stockings. 76 barrels herrings.
Germany	1	40	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 79³/₈ qrs. oatmeal. 100 ,, malt. 95⁵/₈ ,, barley. 766 one-half barrels salmon. 2 boxes stockings.
Italy	4	300	53	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 90,000 stock fish. 47,160 cod and ling fish. 68 barrels herrings. 480 bars lead.
Total	30	1,319	203	

The Union of 1707, by opening up English markets to Scottish manufacturers, proved a great blow to the Staple trade. Of all the Scottish ports which for centuries had been linked commercially with Campvere, Aberdeen alone remained faithful to her age-long mercantile ally. In 1726 the Conservator at Campvere stated that the Staple port was frequented only by a few

ships from Aberdeen, and was practically unknown to the rest of Scotland. Even Aberdeen was inclined to waver from her old allegiance, and found London a better market than Holland or Zealand. For a time at least, there appeared to be some truth in the statement that only such goods as could not be sold in London were sent to Holland.*

On the whole, however, Aberdeen endeavoured to maintain her commercial relations with Campvere. At the opening of the century, it was her boast that few other Scottish ports had kept unbroken for so long the Staple contract with the Zealand port. The municipal authorities had complaints to lodge against many of the other east coast towns, and called upon the Conservator to punish transgressors from Inverness, Banff, Elgin, Leith, and other ports.† Having pointed out that Aberdeen monopolised the greater part of Scottish trade with Campvere, and that therefore she had a special interest in all matters relating to that town's welfare, the magistrates in 1738 ventured to recommend an Aberdeen candidate to fill the vacancy in the Scots Church at Campvere.‡

If the town was not backward in claiming the recognition of her privileges in Zealand, she was equally appreciative of the efforts of the staple port to foster trade between the two countries. In April, 1748, the freedom of Aberdeen was conferred on John Ludovic Ver-Elst, Burgomaster of Campvere, and superintendent of naval affairs in Zealand, "for his zeal shown to the family of the Prince of Orange, for his regard for Scotland and the encouragement of trade, also his kindness to the Scots

* *Scottish Staple at Veere*, pp. 254-5.

† *Letters received by Burgh*. Vol. VIII, Nos. 2-3.

‡ *Letters sent from Burgh*. Vol. II, 6th October, 1738.

people residing in Zealand and the merchants of Aberdeen, and for the fact that he was instrumental in procuring a convoy for our traders in time of war."* A similar honour was conferred on James Stuart, the Conservator, for the valuable services rendered by him to the city and its loading community. †

After 1707, Scotland began to participate in trade with the American Colonies, and though no Scottish port could vie with Glasgow in the rapid increase of its commerce with the plantations, Aberdeen's development as a port in the eighteenth century was due in great part to her connection with America. Voyages to Virginia, Boston, New York and the West Indies increased in number, while the first half of the century witnessed the emigration of many Aberdonians to the West Indies, particularly to Jamaica and Havana. The Aberdeen Birth-briefs contain many references to citizens who sought greater prosperity in the west. During the forties the number included John Fraser, an Aberdeen shipmaster, who went to St. Christopher and traded between the island and the mainland till his death, which occurred on the homeward voyage from Jamaica. James Ogilvie, a prominent city merchant, went to South Carolina in 1744, where he entered into partnership with another Aberdonian settled there. Robert Scott, a tailor in the town, emigrated and carried on his trade in the Barbadoes. ‡

Many other citizens found their way to America, though in numerous instances by involuntary means.

* *Aberdeen Burgh Records* (MSS.). Vol. LXI, 14th April, 1748.

† *Letters sent from Burgh*. Vol. III, 23rd August, 1748.

‡ *Aberdeen Propinquity Books* (Birth-briefs) MSS., circa 1745.

At that period the practice of kidnapping was very prevalent, and the poor creatures who were bought or stolen were lodged in a barn in the city until such time as they could be shipped to America to work on the plantations.

By the middle of the century, Aberdeen's trade with the North American Colonies and with the British Sugar Islands had assumed considerable proportions. In exchange for tobacco and sugar, the port shipped quantities of woollen and linen goods. During the fifties the "Ruby," "Anne," "Adventure" and "Providence" were the principal Aberdeen vessels engaged in the Virginian tobacco trade. The "Indian Queen," a brigantine of 80 tons, and the "Bon-Accord" were the predecessors of those vessels. In the succeeding decade the port's trade with America was very small. For several years not a single ship entered the harbour from the plantations, while in 1766, the "Harriet," with tobacco, staves and walnut planks for Aberdeen, was the sole representative of the town's American trade during the year. Subsequently trade revived, and the "Christie," and the "Janet and Ann" of Aberdeen, made many voyages across the Atlantic. They cleared for Granada, Jamaica, Tobago, Madeira, with linens and woollens, salmon, herrings, French and Portuguese wines, etc., returning to the port with shiploads of coffee, sugar, mahogany, logwood, cotton, rum, pimento, ginger and Madeira wine. At the same time, the port engaged in trade with New York, Halifax, St. John, Boston and Philadelphia, sending abroad the usual commodities and importing indigo, cedar wood, tar, rosin, turpentine, pot and pearl ashes, flax seeds, etc., from New York; pig iron, walnut planks, staves from Philadelphia; logwood and train oil from Boston.*

* *From Customs Letters (MSS.), Collector to Board.*

The wars of the century greatly hampered the trade with America, but in the endeavour to foster the commercial relations between the two countries special privileges were extended to ships bound for the other side of the Atlantic. Provision ships leaving for the Sugar Islands were usually exempted from the embargo laid on all vessels sailing from Aberdeen. They were granted special licence to carry guns and supplies of ammunition. But in spite of beneficial measures, the last quarter of the century showed a marked falling off in voyages to the colonies. From 1775 to 1785 no British plantation tobacco was imported at Aberdeen. Glasgow was practically the only Scottish port whose ships traded with the American and West Indian plantations. From 1789 to 1791 only two vessels left the harbour for New York, and four entered from that port; one cleared for Nova Scotia and three for Granada, but with all the other islands Aberdeen had no commercial dealings.*

The coasting trade of Aberdeen increased greatly towards the end of the century, and exceeded that of Glasgow to as great an extent as Glasgow's foreign trade exceeded that of Aberdeen. From 1772 to 1786, the number of vessels employed annually in the coasting trade ranged from 69 to 86, while in foreign voyages 49 to 65 ships were engaged each year.†

Revolution in the woollen trade, bringing about the importation of large quantities of raw material from London and other English ports, was responsible for part of this increase. As in the preceding century, woollen articles were still one of Aberdeen's principal exports, but in course of time the quality of the goods underwent considerable change. At the beginning of the eighteenth

* *Statistics of Navigation and Commerce* (P.R.O.).

† *Ibid.*

century, the woollen manufactures consisted chiefly of coarse cloths known as plaidings and fingrams, and stockings made by farmers and cottars from the wool of their own sheep, or by the citizens who bought the raw commodity at the weekly market or at periodical fairs held under the supervision of the Dean of Guild. The stockings were packed in bales containing usually about 300 dozen, and a special machine for the purpose was imported from the Continent. The chief market for exportation was Hamburg.

But after 1745, with the cessation of internal political strife in Britain, a period of commercial enterprise and of agricultural improvement set in. New methods in sheep-rearing dispensed with the old mode of procuring the raw material at home. Later, the manufacture of woollen goods was carried on more directly by the merchants, who imported the raw product from London and Newcastle, and were able to turn out a greater variety and better class of articles. Plaidings and fingrams became almost extinct, their place being taken by stockings principally. Two-thirds of the quantity exported found their way to Holland and Germany, one-third to England, Portugal and America. Broad-cloths, serges, baizes, linsey-wolseys and other goods were manufactured and shipped coastwise to the ports between Tain and Perth, while a small proportion of the broad-cloths found their way to London and America.

Salmon still maintained its premier position among the fish exports of Aberdeen; in fact, with the exception of cod, little else was exported for fifty years. After 1707 the salmon found a ready market in London, being boiled, preserved in vinegar, and exported in swift sailing smacks. At a later date, the discovery of ice as

a means of preserving salmon in a fresh condition, gave a new impetus to the trade, and enhanced the value of the fish. The foreign exportation of salmon flourished also, though wars with France had a detrimental effect on the trade. Campvere, Rotterdam, Amsterdam and Havre imported large quantities. During the twenties the "Andrew," "Phœnix," and "Pearl" of Aberdeen, the "Christian and Barbara" of Leith, and the "William and Jean" of Sunderland, were the chief vessels employed in the export of salmon from Aberdeen.* During September and October of the year 1719, 495 barrels were shipped from the port.

In 1744 and 1745 petitions were made by Aberdeen merchants to procure Government passports for carrying Aberdeen salmon to France in time of war. The licence already granted for tobacco, if extended to the other commodity, would, they declared, be highly beneficial to Aberdeen. Should the exportation of salmon be forbidden, an entire loss of stock would ensue, since the whole being cured with foreign salt, home consumption was prohibited by law.†

From time to time complaints reached the town from abroad concerning the careless and even fraudulent packing and curing of salmon, and Aberdeen was in danger of losing her prestige in the foreign markets. For example, in 1761, 311 barrels of salmon marked with the letters ABDN were bought by Robert Hogg of Campvere as Aberdeen salmon (the trade mark of which was ABD), and as such, 150 barrels were sold to Augustin Turmine of Amiens. The goods proved to be greatly inferior to the Aberdeen salmon. The magistrates

* *Customs Letters*. From Collector to Board (1720-24).

† *Letters sent from Burgh*. Vol. II, 18th July, 1744; 1st March, 1745.

expressed regret for the bad bargain, declaring that since the perpetration of a similar fraud in 1757 every care had been taken in the packing, curing, and inspection of the fish. The Dee and Don salmon were subjected to the closest scrutiny. Enquiries, however, brought to light the fact that John Burnett, lessee of the Ythan salmon fishing, had in the previous year ordered a branding iron with the letters ABDN, and having branded the barrels himself, shipped them on board an Arbroath vessel for Campvere.

To prevent such practices in future, the magistrates sent to Paris, for publication in all the foreign newspapers, copies of an abstract of the Town Council's Act, confirmed by the Convention of Burghs, relating to branding irons and trade marks. Similar copies were sent to Holland, other parts of France, and to the Conservator in Zealand.*

Another feature of the eighteenth century was the progress made in shipbuilding. The first Aberdeen ship, it has been stated, was built in 1606, and later a dock was constructed for shipbuilding and repairs. But the industry made little advance till the middle of the eighteenth century, although for long it had been the custom to encourage a master to reside at the port. In 1741 the post of ship's carpenter having fallen vacant, the magistrates and members of the Shipmasters' Society appointed Alexander Wilson of Dundee at an annual salary of £6.† The only other shipbuilders at that time were the Gibbons of Torry, a prominent seafaring family, of whom several members were ship-

* *Letters received by the Burgh.* Vol. XII, No. 159.

Letters sent by the Burgh. Vol. V, 22nd June, 1761; 29th September, 1761.

† *History of the Shipmasters' Society*, p. 39 n.

masters. They apparently had a small shipyard in Torry opposite Pocra.

In 1753 Simon Halliday, having built a barge for Captain Strachan of Aberdeen, requested permission to set up business at the port. He was granted the lease of a piece of ground one hundred by thirty yards, at the south end of Footdee village, to be enclosed both as a wood-yard and dock for repairing and building ships. The Town Council further voted £60 stg. for a dwelling house. A ship arrived in harbour with wood for Halliday's work, and as the freight was £40 stg. payable on delivery, he was obliged to apply to the magistrates for the immediate payment of the £60.*

Apparently Halliday had the field entirely to himself for several years, and it was not till 1764 that two other carpenters, James Bruce and James Jaffray, applied for land on which to erect a dockyard. Halliday, they urged, was unable to accomplish all the work necessary, especially in building lighters and other craft required for the growing trade of the burgh. The ground granted to them extended from the south-west towards the bents and along the north-east side of the road leading to the new quay at Pocra.† In 1767 Halliday asked for an extension of his lease for 26 years. Being anxious to erect new buildings and a saw-mill, the cost of which was estimated at £200 stg., he deemed it useless and imprudent to undertake such improvements only to have to surrender all to the town at his death. The lease was extended, but for some reason unknown, shortly afterwards Halliday renounced it and sold his house and dockyard for 100 guineas. His

* *Aberdeen Burgh Records* (MSS.). Vol. LXI, 4th July, 1753; Vol. LXII, 8th October, 1753.

† *Ibid.* Vol. LXIII, p. 5.

successor was Walter McKail, to whom the town granted a twenty-three years' "tack" of the dockyard.*

Subsequently there was something like a boom in shipbuilding at Aberdeen. A Committee was appointed to receive proposals for persons desiring to lease dockyards, and reported in 1788 that five lots of ground leading to Pocra were available for the purpose. At the same time Gibbon's house and shipyard were sold by private bargain.† One of the yards was leased by a William Stephen, and would seem to have been slightly inadequate, as an appeal was made to the magistrates for permission to erect props outside the dockyard fence to support the stern of a vessel he was building.‡

Some idea of the port's output in the shipbuilding industry during the last decade of the eighteenth century may be gathered from the following figures. Though real strides were not made till the beginning of the nineteenth century, in the preceding years the town was gradually forging her way to a foremost place among Scottish ports.

The numbers of vessels built at Aberdeen in various years between 1787 and 1800 were §:—

Year.	No. of Vessels.	Tonnage.
1787	20	1,262
1788	17	1,373
1789	9	485
1790	9	810
1792-3	11	1,030
1795-6	9	609
1798-9	20	1,863

* *Aberdeen Burgh Records* (MSS.). Vol. LXIII, pp. 100, 106.

† *Ibid.* Vol. LXV, pp. 201, 229, 231-2.

‡ *Letters received by the Burgh.* Vol. 13, No. 187.

§ Collected from *Statistics of Navigation and Commerce* (P.R.O.).

Most of the vessels were quite small, ranging from 40 to 140 tons. Only four vessels over 160 tons were built at Aberdeen, the largest being a ship of 227 tons, constructed in the year 1792-3.

Till almost the end of the century Aberdeen did not achieve a higher place than third in shipbuilding, and in 1789, when only 9 ships of 810 tons gross stood to her credit, she was outstripped by Glasgow, Leith, Kirkcaldy, Inverness, and Irvine. But the year 1798-9 marked a considerable advance. Aberdeen built the largest number of ships of any port in Scotland, although the gross tonnage of Glasgow-built ships (numbering 16 in all) exceeded that of Aberdeen.

More steady progress is to be found in the number of vessels belonging to the port* :—

Year.	No. of Vessels.	Tonnage.	No. of Men Navigating them.
1788	129	11,603	—
1789	167	12,640	865
1790	176	13,309	905
1792	187	13,512	985
1795	198	14,516	1,073
1798	236	18,369	1,266

In 1790 Aberdeen came third after Glasgow and Leith, which possessed a greater number of ships and greater aggregate tonnage. Eight years later she held the second place after Port Glasgow and Greenock combined. The largest vessel belonging to the port during the period was one of 284 tons, navigated by 14 men. In the fifteen years prior to 1788 the figures varied little, the total number of ships belonging to Aberdeen fluctuating between 125 (6,525 tons) and 143 (8,430 tons). But the vessels increased in size. In 1785-6 the port possessed 143 ships of 7,941 tons. Two years later,

* Collected from *Statistics of Navigation and Commerce* (P.R.O.).

though the number was reduced to 129, the tonnage had increased to 11,603.

The ships in common use at the port at that time included types which are now becoming extinct. The "brig," the "brigantine" and the "snow," all varieties of two-masted ships; the "ketch," which at a later period became somewhat rare, but has of recent years been greatly revived in the coasting trade, the single-masted "sloop" and "cutter" and the "galley" were all engaged in carrying merchandise to and from the port coastwise and to foreign countries.

It is noteworthy that during this period (1772-86) Aberdeen never possessed more than 7 fishing boats, and for several years none at all. In 1782-3 the tonnage of fishing vessels was only 320. Campbeltown had 41 fishing vessels of 2,226 tons, Greenock 57 of 1,878 tons, and Rothesay 26 of 1,241 tons. In 1778 the number of fishing and pilot boats combined amounted only to 12, 4 belonging to Footdee, 4 to Torry, and 4 to Cove.* Various attempts to foster the fishing industry were made by the magistrates. In 1771, for example, they gave financial assistance in order to encourage the trawl fishing of flat fish which the fishermen of Hartlepool were endeavouring to establish in the bay.† The herring fishing was still almost entirely in the hands of foreigners, but efforts were made from time to time to maintain a number of herring busses. Three vessels of 30-40 tons were fitted out at the port in 1787 and in subsequent years for the bounty herring fishery.‡

Not only did the magistrates encourage new fishing

* *Letters sent from Burgh*. Vol. VIII, 14th Nov. 1775.

† *Aberdeen Burgh Records* (MSS.). Vol. LXIII, p. 167.

‡ *Customs Letters* (MSS.). Collector to Board, 6th December, 1787.

experiments and ventures, but they not infrequently opened the civic purse on behalf of needy fishermen. One instance may be quoted. Arthur Gibbon, having repaired a fishing boat at a cost of £22 Scots, detained the same until payment should be made. But the skipper could not afford to pay, and could not get to sea in order to earn the money required. The Town Council, on being appealed to, ordered the Master of Mortification to pay for the repairs of the boat.*

The commencement of the whaling industry at Aberdeen dates from 1752, when a company was formed which fitted out and sent to Greenland in March of the following year two vessels of 500 tons, the "St. Anne" and the "City of Aberdeen." In July the former returned to port with five whales, and the latter with two. For a time the venture met with some measure of success, and from 1755 to 1763 the two vessels imported upwards of 8 tons of whale fins and 350 butts of train oil or blubber. But in the following twelve years the trade was nil, and the company was dissolved.† Failure was partly due to the exigencies of war. As far as possible every facility was granted to whaling vessels. They were exempted from the general embargo laid on ships, and measures were taken to protect Greenland fishermen from impressment.‡ But these did not always avail, and in 1760 five seamen from the "City of Aberdeen" were impressed on the excuse that their "protections," dated July, 1758, were not legal. The commander of the King's ship offered to release the fishermen only on condition that eight men who had deserted from his ship at Aberdeen should be restored.§

* *Aberdeen Burgh Records* (MSS.). Vol. LIX, p. 276.

† *Customs Letters*. Collector to Board, April, 1775.

‡ *Letters received by Burgh*. Vol. II, No. 88.

§ *Ibid.* Vol. XII, No. 2.



THE WATERSIDE, FOOTDEE, ABERDEEN.

From a Photograph taken in 1859.

The " St. Anne " was a handsome New England frigate-built ship, a swift sailer with good accommodation for officers and crew, and constructed to carry from 16 to 20 guns. The managers of the Whale Fishing Co. decided to hire her out, between seasons, to the Government in order to cruise on the coast. It transpired, therefore, that about the time when the " City of Aberdeen " lay in the harbour waiting for a convoy to take her to the Greenland seas, her sister whaling ship was distinguishing herself by the capture of a French privateer in the bay.*

In 1783 another whaling company was formed, and two vessels—the " Hercules " and " Latona "—equipped. Captain James Gibbon, one of the partners, purchased a vessel of 400 tons in London. Owing to severe weather the ship was detained there till almost the commencement of the whaling season. As a vessel of this burden could not enter or leave the harbour save at high spring tides, Gibbon requested that, should the vessel arrive at Aberdeen during low tide, she might be allowed to clear for Greenland without having to undergo measurement, and that the tonnage as reckoned by the London authorities might be accepted for the time being. †

In 1787 the " Christian " of Aberdeen was added to the number of whaling vessels, and in the same year Francis Leys & Co., merchants in Aberdeen, with a view to engaging in the whaling industry on a big scale, petitioned the magistrates for the erection at Pocra Pier of suitable buildings for the manufacture of whale oil. ‡

**Letters sent from Burgh.* Vol. IV, 29th May, 1756; April, 1757.

† *Customs Letters.* Collector to Board, 3rd March, 1784.

‡ *Aberdeen Burgh Records (MSS.).* Vol. LXV, p. 168.

The "Hercules" and "Latona," as also the "Robert" of Peterhead, continued in the trade for many years, but there was no increase in the industry until the nineteenth century.

In the course of 100 years, rapid strides were made in harbour reconstruction. The Town Council passed numerous measures for repairs and alterations. The weigh-house was improved and refloored with timber saved from the wreck of a ship cast ashore at Belhelvie in 1708. Part of the wood was also used in constructing the wooden head of the south pier. The Earl of Errol, as Admiral of the coast, after claiming and receiving £300 stg. as his share of the salvage, gifted a considerable sum towards the expense of building the new pier at Torry.*

In 1726 the shipmasters petitioned the Council to provide timber poles on the north side of Torry Pool for convenience of ships lying there. The Master of Shoreworks was instructed to order timber from Danzig for that purpose. Great expense was incurred by allowing the piers, especially the "great easter" pier, to fall into a ruinous condition. To obviate the difficulty, Arthur Gibbon of Torry was appointed overseer at a salary of £18 Scots. His duties included the inspection of piers two or three times weekly and the repairing of all damages instantly. For those involving longer time, he and his employees were to be paid regular wages, while failure to notify the Master of Shoreworks concerning necessary repairs would result in a deduction of £3 from his yearly salary.†

The dilapidated condition of the stairs leading to the shore was a constant grievance of skippers, who

* *Aberdeen Burgh Records* (MSS.). Vol. LVIII, pp. 86-91.

† *Ibid.* Vol. LX, p. 169.

feared that damage might be done both to seamen and cargoes. The magistrates agreed to their proposal to build an office at the head of the shore near the Custom House. Other improvements followed. The fish market which, prior to 1742, had been situated in Castle Street, was removed to the head of the old shore, where boats could be conveniently unloaded.* The following year the Torry pier was reconstructed, a part being demolished and rebuilt, extending for 100 yards.†

The careless disposal of shingle and sand ballast had an injurious effect on the quay leading from the town to Footdee. Certain shipmasters, instead of throwing it on the pier, were in the habit of depositing their ballast on Torry pier, from which it was frequently washed in stormy weather, to the imminent danger of shipping. Preventive measures were taken; a harbour overseer was appointed in 1751, with sole direction of the shore in matters of ballast-throwing and the mooring of ships at the quay. For the convenience of loading and unloading of ships, a small pier was erected at Pocrá in 1755, but within a few years was badly damaged by the malpractice of mooring vessels to the upper wooden verge of the quay. The Town Council prohibited such methods, and ordered the pier to be rebuilt. The new pier was opened in 1763.

From time to time engineers were brought from other towns to inspect the harbour, and in 1770 a resolution was passed adopting Mr. Smeaton's plan of carrying out a pier from Sandness along the north side of the river for 300 yards. The improvement was the means of gaining four feet of water and rendering the entrance of more uniform depth; at the same time the

* *Aberdeen Burgh Records* (MSS.). Vol. LX, p. 259; Vol. LXI, p. 52.

† *Ibid.* Vol. LXI, p. 108.

burn or ship's fairway from the harbour mouth to the quay was cleaned out and deepened. To defray expenses, Parliament was approached for permission to impose a tonnage duty of 4d. on all ships entering the harbour, except those carrying coal and lime, which were to be charged 2d. The duty was later changed to 3d. on all ships indiscriminately. In April, 1773, the Harbour Bill was passed, and the work commenced the following year. On the recommendation of Mr. Smeaton, John Gwyn, engineer, was appointed to carry out the work at an annual salary of £120 for five years. Arthur Gibbon was entrusted with the building of a lighter to carry stones and other materials necessary for the work.*

The improvements were accomplished slowly under the supervision of a committee appointed to inspect the harbour. In May, 1786, they were authorised to execute repairs to the extent of £250 stg. The pier having been erected too far to the north did not sufficiently narrow the channel, and produced a considerable swell in the harbour at high water. The need for a jetty to act as a breakwater had been suggested by Smeaton, but it was not till 1789 that Provost Abercrombie's Jetty was built near the western end of the bulwark. Money was voted on different occasions for cleaning and deepening the interior of the harbour. Minute regulations were also passed for the berthing of ships in the harbour, the proper disposal of ballast, the unloading and removing of lime and paving-stone cargoes, and the clearing away of all wrecks and other obstructions within the harbour.†

* *Aberdeen Burgh Records* (MSS.). Vol. LXI, pp. 510, 570, 600; Vol. LXII, pp. 62, 260; Vol. LXIII, pp. 103, 167, 214-16; Vol. LXIV, pp. 39-44, 209.

† *Ibid.* Vol. LXV, p. 133 seq.

The coast north of Aberdeen was the scene of many wrecks throughout the century, and the list of Aberdeen vessels lost or damaged at sea, and of foreign vessels voyaging to and from the port stranded upon the north-east coast, was a formidable one. The stranding in 1708 of the Levant galley of Amsterdam, the "Fussroun Geertruy," under Captain Jan Cooter, on the sands of Belhelvie while on its way to Madeira and Curaçoa with a valuable cargo, was turned to good account. The cargo, bought by the merchants of Aberdeen, was handed over to the magistrates for the benefit of the community, while, as we have already seen, the salvage money donated by the Earl of Errol and the timber from the ship were put to a good use.*

In the following years many vessels carrying merchandise to and from Aberdeen were wrecked or stranded: the "Elizabeth" of Aberdeen, with crew and cargo, was totally lost in 1708; the "St. Lucas," bound for the port with a large consignment of goods for various Aberdeen merchants, was stranded at Montrose in 1711, many of the goods damaged, and others stolen. The "Friendship" of Aberdeen left the harbour in November, 1713, for Venice, laden with salmon, stockfish, lead, and herrings. The ship sailed under convey to Cadiz, proceeding alone thereafter till lost by fog and storm off the coast of Calabria. The entire cargo, belonging to the Farquharson family of Finzean and Invercauld, was lost. The "Arthur," also belonging to the port, was stranded in the road of Danzig and most of the cargo damaged. The "Pearl," bound for Leghorn, was in 1715 also wrecked off the Calabrian coast. The "Nightingale," sailing from the

* *Aberdeen Burgh Records* (MSS.). Vol. LVIII, p. 85 seq.

port for Campvere, disappeared, nothing ever being heard of crew and cargo.

The "Duncan" galley of London was stranded off Girdleness in December, 1716. The crew put ashore, and the signals of distress attracted large crowds of people to the shore. They refused, however, to help in saving the cargo, even when offered payment. Charles Norman, the skipper, and James Dunbar, a passenger, rode to town to solicit the magistrates' help. On their return they found that high seas had sundered the ship, while the cargo was nowhere to be seen. The crowds congregated were stealing everything that was washed ashore, even under fire from the soldiers sent to guard the wreck.*

The master of the "Sancta Maria" attempted to sink his ship off the coast in June, 1722. A number of Newburgh whitefishers saw the ship riding at anchor about a mile from the harbour, where for two days she lay without attempting to enter. The ship was seen to fall over on her port side, whereupon several of the fishermen rowed out to investigate, and finding no one on board, towed her within a short distance of the harbour mouth, where she ran aground. The skipper, appearing in a little boat from Collieston, seemed anxious to dissuade the fishermen from saving his vessel. The boats went out to sea intending to take the ship into harbour at high water, but in the interval the skipper had reappeared, cut off the mainsail and as much of the rigging as he could reach, and removed the cargo.†

The "Planter" of London, purchased for a number of Aberdeen merchants by Robert Ragg, shipmaster in

* *Propinquity Books* (Birth-briefs). Vol. I, 5th December, 1716, etc.

† *Ibid.* 5th October, 1722.

Aberdeen, and freighted home from Maryland, was stranded and lost on an uninhabited island to the north of Cape Delaware. Part of the wreck and cargo saved were carried to Philadelphia.* In June, 1749, the magistrates were notified that the "Greenock" of Inverkeithing, laden with tobacco from Virginia, had been stranded at Cairnbulg. The authorities were petitioned to lend assistance in securing the cargo and in preventing theft.† If the practice of wrecking ships was not so prevalent on the north-east coast as in certain other parts of the kingdom, at least the coast dwellers were not slow to take advantage of the opportunities which a wreck or stranded vessel afforded. Again and again complaints were sent to the magistrates that cargoes of stranded vessels suffered more at the hands of despoilers than by storm and sea-water. Guards were placed on the shore, heavy fines imposed on those found guilty of plunder, but in spite of such measures wholesale robbery continued. In 1760, when another Aberdeen vessel struck a rock and was broken in pieces off Scotston, the inhabitants carried off bales of goods washed in by the sea, and maltreated the soldiers who tried to prevent them.‡

All matters relating to wrecks and salvage were referred to the Admiral of the coast, then the Earl of Findlater, and the Aberdeen magistrates, who were appointed his deputies in 1738. Their jurisdiction extended over an area stretching from Bervie to Fraserburgh. In March, 1762, Lord Findlater surrendered all share in the profits arising from the office since 1738, requesting the magistrates to apply his share in the

* *Propinquity Books* (Birth-briefs). Vol. I, 3rd December, 1743.

† *Letters received by Burgh*. Vol. X, No. 149.

‡ *Ibid.* Vol. XII, Nos. 26, 28, 29.

salvage of ships to some charitable purpose, preferably to alleviate distress caused through mercantile losses. The account between Lord Findlater and his deputies in relation to salvages received by them since 1738 gives a fair idea of the frequency of shipwrecks on the Aberdeenshire coast during that period* :—

THE MAGISTRATES OF ABERDEEN.

		£	s.	d.	(Scots.)
1739.	To produce of small whale and 11 spars cast ashore at Muchalls - - - -	12	12	0	
1740.	„ neat salvage of ship “Felton” stranded at Fraserburgh	1,020	8	0	
1741.	„ a cargo of iron at sands of Belhelvie - - - -	488	17	0	
1742.	„ produce of $\frac{1}{2}$ hogshead wine at Donmouth - - - -	60	18	0	
1743.	„ neat salvage of “Robert of Leven” stranded at Fraserburgh - - - -	183	0	0	
1744.	„ “Elizabeth of Burntisland” stranded at Fraserburgh	234	3	0	
1745.	„ the “Boatman” of Chris- tiania at Stonehaven -	182	18	0	
				<hr/>	£2,182 16 0
1748.	„ produce of wood cast in at Peterhead - - - -	185	9	4	
1749.	„ neat salvage of “Greenock of Inverkeithing” and Dutch Dogger at Cairn- bulg - - - -	1,969	2	8	
1751.	„ produce of a mast wrecked at Peterhead - - - -	63	0	0	
1754.	„ neat produce and salvage of “St. Peter” of Tonsberg, “Helen” and “Isobel,” stranded at Peterhead, and “Alex” and “Eliza- beth” - - - -	717	4	0	
1755.	„ neat produce and salvage of “Jean and Elizabeth” of Dundee - - - -	619	12	6	
				<hr/>	3,554 8 6

* *Aberdeen Burgh Records* (MSS.). Vol. LXII, p. 333 seq.

DEVELOPMENT OF PORT IN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY 89

	£	s.	d.	(Scots.)
Brought forward -	-	-	-	£5,737 4 6
1756. To neat produce and salvage of "Happy Isobel" of Fraser- burgh, etc. - - -	718	10	0	
1757. ,, neat produce and salvage of "Hercules" of Inverness, etc. - - - - -	423	13	0	
,, produce of whale cast ashore on sands of Belhelvie— neat - - - - -	1,077	3	0	
1758. ,, neat salvage of "Three Sisters" of Easter Iser wrecked at Caterline -	206	3	0	
1760. ,, neat salvage of "Martha" and "Mary" of Berwick stranded near Peterhead	1,180	7	0	
1761. ,, neat salvage of Malby Her- ring Buss of Montrose stranded on sands of Foveran - - - - -	308	10	0	
	<hr/>			3,994 6 0
	(Scots)			<u>£9,731 10 6</u>

Two years later (1764) a memorial was presented to the Lords Commissioners of the Treasury by the Earl of Fife, pointing out that the large number of shipwrecks which had occurred on the east coast was due chiefly to the want of a safe harbour between Leith and Cromarty, and advocating the building of a pier and harbour in the Bay of Down (on the Moray Firth) as a safe retreat for ships driven on the coast. The harbour was constructed at considerable expense. An enquiry was made as to its suitability for a harbour of refuge and a consensus of opinion taken among seafaring people as to its public utility. The Commission reported the harbour to be of sufficient depth, and useful for ships passing up and down the Firth, as they could enter Down when other havens were impossible.*

* *Customs Letters.* Collector to Board, 15th March, 1764; 31st March, 1764.

Whether the new arrangement was instrumental in reducing the number of shipwrecks is not known, but they were certainly less frequent on the north-east coast during the later years of the century.

Among the many voyages of ships to and from the port, a few stand out as affording greater interest than most. Sailing ships of those days were very much at the mercy of wind and weather. In January, 1714, the "William" of Aberdeen, with a cargo of goods for the port, sailed from Leith on a voyage which lasted three weeks. When near Aberdeen, a storm of wind from the south-east forced her to carry sail to get out of the bay. With great difficulty the "William" reached the Moray Firth and lay in Cromarty harbour for 10 days. Sailing south she reached Fraserburgh, where again she was detained 11 days before reaching Aberdeen.*

In the same year, Alexander Burnett, master of the "Dragon" galley of Aberdeen, when plying his trade in the Straits of Gibraltar, came across a fellow-Aberdonian under unexpected but pleasant circumstances. The "Dragon" put into Tarragona Bay, where there were several English ships in the transport service of Philip of Spain. Mr. Fordyce, a native of Aberdeenshire and commissary-general of transports, came aboard Burnett's ship, and on learning that the latter belonged to Aberdeen, invited him on board the "Portugal." He offered to assist Burnett in selling his cargo of fish, and after securing a pass for the skipper from the Governor of Tarragona, Fordyce sent an aide-de-camp with a convoy to conduct the "Dragon" to the English factory at Rouss. Later in the year, Burnett unloaded a cargo of corn at Tarragona for the King of Spain's use. Both then and later at Cadiz, Burnett had the

* *Birth-briefes*, 15th February, 1714.

pleasure of renewing his acquaintance with Fordyce.*

The "Concord" of Peterhead, which sailed to South Carolina in 1740, underwent many vicissitudes before returning to Scotland. The ship, under the command of Andrew Arbuthnot, arriving at Charlestown in August of that year, was immediately ordered to Georgetown to load rice. Messrs. Cleland and Wallace, to whom the ship had been consigned, having learned that several British ships entering the English Channel had been captured by Spanish privateers, requested Captain Arbuthnot to sail by the north of Scotland and unload at Peterhead.

The ship left Georgetown, but her pilot ran her aground in the river, and when again afloat, it was thought advisable to return to Georgetown, where the cargo was unloaded and the ship careened. On the day that the last of the cargo was re-shipped, Captain Arbuthnot died of fever. Robert Forbes, mate of the "Concord," took command, and on account of the delay, the Georgetown firm gave him permission to sail through the Channel or go by the safer northern route as wind and weather would permit. Forbes made for the Channel, and early in December reached Scilly. He endeavoured to reach the Isle of Wight, but was driven near the Dutch coast. Arriving eventually off Peterhead, Forbes went ashore to acquaint the relatives of Captain Arbuthnot with the latter's death. When about to return to the ship, to his surprise he saw the crew entering the harbour in the ship's boat. They informed him that a change in the wind had compelled them to draw nearer the shore sooner than their orders warranted, whereupon the ship struck on the rocks, and in 10 minutes sank. Forbes was summoned before the

* *Birth-briefs*, 1714.

magistrates and the Admirals Depute at Aberdeen. All papers relating to the ship and her voyage perished, but Forbes's story was later corroborated by the crew of the "Concord," who were too sick and weak after the voyage to permit of their travelling to Aberdeen to give their declarations.*

The magistrates still took an active interest in the coming and going of ships, their cargoes and voyages, and the disputes that arose between merchants regarding the goods imported or exported or between members of the crew.

In 1710 the Town Council was called upon to give judgment in the case of Alexander Innes *v.* Henry Beitch, two ship's captains. The latter accused Innes of ill-treating him on the voyage from the Firth of Forth to Aberdeen. Fleming, another skipper who had sailed with the defendant, gave evidence on behalf of Captain Innes to the effect that Beitch and most of his crew boarded Innes's ship at Elieness, whence this ship was towed to Aberdeen, that the prosecutor was well treated, and in searching and seizing the goods on board the ship, no opposition was offered to Beitch and his men. The vessel sailed under convoy of the "Squirrel," but on arriving in Aberdeen road, a lieutenant from the convoy attempted to press some of the crew from Captain Innes's ship. In their efforts they were, according to the evidence, ably supported by Captain Beitch. Having, with the latter's permission, procured weapons from his ship, the lieutenant and his men returned armed to Captain Innes's ship and secured three of the crew. The ship not being moored ran aground, and both vessel and cargo suffered damage. The mishap was followed by the immediate departure of Captain

* *Birth-briefes*, 30th December, 1740.

Beitch. The above particulars were corroborated by others, and as Beitch appeared unable to give evidence in support of his accusation, the case was doubtless decided in favour of Captain Innes, who certainly appeared to be the ill-used party.*

When goods were received by the merchants in a damaged condition, the cause was generally attributed to lack of care in loading, to storm or other mishap at sea, but the case of the pack of broad-cloth shipped in the " Pearl " galley from Leith in 1719 savoured somewhat of a mystery. The goods were shipped intact by the Leith merchants, or so they averred, but when delivered at Aberdeen, the ropes were found to be cut at one end and three pieces missing. The mate, when examined, declared that on loading the goods he observed that the bale was loose at one of the ends and that the straw and old clothing were hanging out. He did not interfere with the goods, nor was he aware of anyone else doing so. Each member of the crew, when examined, corroborated his statement. Consequently the authorities appear to have been unable to discover the guilty person.†

Of all the difficulties with which the Customs authorities had to contend during the eighteenth century, the most outstanding were those connected with (1) quarantine regulations, (2) smuggling, (3) the complications of the Navigation Laws.

In 1720 letters were issued by the Royal Burghs that the kingdom was in danger of being infected by plague from goods and persons coming from the Bay of Biscay. Precautions were taken and orders issued by the

* *Propinquity Books* (Birth-briefs). Vol. I, 16th June, 1710.

† *Ibid.* 29th October, 1719.

Edinburgh Town Council that all ships from that quarter must perform quarantine, and that no wine covered with linen and straw was to be imported.* A difficulty arose in the case of an Aberdeen vessel, the "Pearl," which arrived from Cadiz. But the latter port, not being within the Bay of Biscay or the Mediterranean, it was decided not to enforce quarantine, provided the master could prove that the ship had come direct from Cadiz and that all on board were in good health.† Forty years later Cadiz was still regarded as "plague-proof."‡

The Quarantine Act conferred on the Customs Commissioners the privilege of naming the ports where vessels had to perform quarantine. But as Aberdeen was not among the number, the local authorities suggested that ships belonging to the port might safely be permitted to perform quarantine in a small creek within the river Dee between Torry and the town, known as St. Thomas Inch, a point at which guards could conveniently be placed. Since the Act, it was remarked, no wine ship had entered the port, but the cargoes were known to have been run in the district. The Customs officers contended that if ships were allowed to perform quarantine at Aberdeen, they would enter their wines in the orthodox way.§

Apparently the request was not granted, as many years later infected ships coming to the port or to any of the creeks were all ordered south in conformity with the regulations.

In 1779 orders were transmitted to Aberdeen that

* *Letters received by Burgh.* Vol. IX, No. 6.

† *Customs Letters.* Collector to Board, 31st May, 1721.

‡ *Ibid.* 25th August, 1760.

§ *Ibid.* 26th November, 1722.

all ships coming from any place in the Mediterranean, Gibraltar included, and the west coast of Barbary, were subject to quarantine. Later a clause was added to include ships, part of whose cargo consisted of goods imported from or grown in Turkey and the Levant.* The master of any such ship was required to fill up a form answering the queries stated; the ship was kept to windward, and the form after being dipped in vinegar and fumigated, was returned to the authorities in a slit stick.

Sufficient evidence had to be shown that a ship had performed quarantine at some other port on the homeward voyage, otherwise it was compelled to return to Inverkeithing Bay. The "Janet" of Aberdeen arrived in the bay with a cargo of coal from Sunderland, having previously returned from Gibraltar. The master stated that quarantine had been performed at Guernsey, but as no proof could be produced, the ship was ordered to Inverkeithing.

Towards the close of the century, an outbreak of fever in Philadelphia made quarantine a necessity for all ships from Pennsylvania bound for the east coast of Scotland.

An enormous amount of canny smuggling was carried on in Scotland during the eighteenth century, and though not conducted in the bold and open fashion that obtained in certain parts of England, was nevertheless quite as effective in reducing the revenue. The north-east coast was the scene of considerable activity in this direction, and illicit trading was fostered by the practice of loading and unloading ships at the smaller ports. All the creeks from Caterline to Cullen came under the jurisdiction of the Aberdeen Customs authorities,

* *Customs Letters*. Collector to Board, 7th June, 1779; 13th October, 1780.

and as it was impossible to guard them all properly, ample opportunity was afforded for the running of goods before the officers could reach the creeks. It was found that ships discharging at these places entered much smaller cargoes than vessels of equal burden unloading at the port.

Complaints were made to the Commissioners and a remedy suggested—namely, that all import and export trade be carried on henceforth at the port only, and that no vessel be allowed to load or discharge at any of the creeks except coastwise, and in that trade, wool and tobacco should also be barred.* Numerous frauds were perpetrated in the wool trade, the exportation of which was prohibited. The wool was carried to Newburgh, Peterhead, Fraserburgh, Portsoy, etc., and thence transported overseas.

The smuggling of wine and brandy in particular had become very extensive, and called for the utmost precautions on the part of the authorities. Not only was the practice prejudicial to the revenue, but danger arose from smugglers bringing home ships subject to quarantine and allowing their boats to come alongside these ships in the bay. Moreover, honest traders found it difficult to obtain a market for their goods, since smugglers managed to convey the commodities to the town and dispose of them to retailers and shopkeepers at a lower figure. The authorities suggested that a sloop should be stationed at Peterhead to prevent illicit trading in the north and divert it into the proper channel.†

The habit of allowing merchants to ship goods coastwise in vessels coming from or going to foreign parts

* *Customs Letters*. Collector to Board, 17th July, 1721.

† *Ibid.* 31st December, 1722.

gave further scope for smuggling. In February, 1724, the authorities suggested that goods should not be placed on board ships touching at the port on their way from a foreign country to some other British port.*

Bergen was then the Staple port for all foreign commodities entering Scandinavia. When loading contraband goods overseas, it was the custom of smuggling skippers to obtain a bill of lading for Bergen. Thus if in attempting to run a cargo ashore, they were driven by stress of weather into a British port, they could produce papers to account for the presence of large quantities of brandy or wines. The authorities were fully aware of the subterfuge, however, and on not a few occasions when this plea had been accepted and the ship was allowed to depart for Bergen, she had once more been driven into port, but this time minus the cargo of brandy.

In January, 1747, the "Anne" of Aberdeen, a "snow" of 150 tons, arrived in port with a cargo which on inspection was found to contain a large amount of prohibited and high-duty goods. James Ferguson, the skipper, declared that these were bound for Bergen, but could produce no bills of lading or clearance, having, he stated, thrown them overboard as a precaution against privateers. A search could not be made till most of the goods for Aberdeen were discharged, but a close watch was kept. The "Anne" had loaded goods both at Oporto and Rotterdam, and discharged at Aberdeen wine, raisins, salt, flax, old iron, and linseed. In the centre of a bale of undressed flax was discovered a quantity of prohibited goods—cambric, glass beads, bone combs, spectacles, brass thimbles, etc. The cargo for Bergen included a goodly array of wine, spirits, soap,

* *Customs Letters*. Collector to Board, 4th February, 1724.

gunpowder, rum, liquorice juice, oil, figs, almonds, seeds, raisins and currants, starch, vinegar, apples, prunes, tea, coffee, cinnamon, paper, India goods, looking-glasses, iron wire, white soap, etc. The vessel left the port for Bergen on 18th April, but in spite of all precautions the goods, it was believed, were landed at Kirkwall.*

Frequently ships arrived at the port from America with cargoes of tobacco or rum intended for Holland and other countries. While the vessel was being loaded, care had to be taken to prevent the smuggling of tobacco or spirits. The large quantities of snuff consumed at Aberdeen or sent coastwise at that period were manufactured, it was thought, from tobacco run from Holland or reloaded from ships outward bound.†

Several flagrant cases of smuggling were reported in June, 1744. Intelligence having reached Aberdeen that certain vessels from Holland were engaged in illicit trading, Customs officers were posted at the harbour and town entrances. On the 28th the "Vernon" and "Providence" of Aberdeen arrived in port with the news that three vessels, two of them belonging to Aberdeen, were busy smuggling on the coast, and that a large quantity of goods was coming to town by various roads. At night the Collector, with two tidewaiters and two boatmen, armed with search warrants, left the town. Two of the officials were sent to the Denburn to join a third who had been stationed there. Coming suddenly upon two horses laden with contraband goods, they attempted to seize them, but were attacked by a mob of men disguised in women's clothes, wearing swords and

* *Customs Letters*. Collector to Board, 25th February, 1747; 13th March, 1747; 22nd May, 1747.

† *Ibid.* 18th October, 1733.

carrying other weapons. The firing of shots brought the Collector and his men on the scene, and the mob dispersed, not, however, before the son of a prominent Aberdeen merchant had been killed in the fray and another wounded.

The Collector feared that the mob might attack the King's warehouse, which had no soldiers to guard it at the time. To make matters worse, the two tidewaiters, who, in the execution of their duty and in their own defence had been responsible for the death of two citizens, were apprehended by the magistrates and committed to the Tolbooth. Apparently the municipal authorities regarded smuggling with no unfavourable eye, giving their support to their fellow-townsmen against the Customs officials. The Collector complained to the Commissioners that "a spirit of malice was abroad" which hindered his men in the execution of their duties even in the face of open and daylight robbery. He further asserted that a strong combination was at work to procure a warrant for his own apprehension. The Collector's fears were realised; he was apprehended and imprisoned in the Tolbooth on 3rd July.*

About that time, Aberdeen acquired a reputation for tobacco smuggling which apparently was quite undeserved.† It would seem that in Glasgow, where more tobacco was clandestinely run than was openly imported on the east coast, where the trade was in its infancy, the merchants sought to vindicate themselves against the charge of fraud at the expense of Aberdeen. The Glasgow tobacco merchants, being jealous of competition in the trade so long monopolised by them, instructed all

* *Customs Letters*. Collector to Board, 29th June, 1744.

† *Letters sent from the Burgh* (MSS.). Vol. III, 25th May, 1751.

carters carrying tobacco from Glasgow or Dumfries into England to say that it came from Aberdeen. The magistrates were willing to acknowledge that the port was not entirely free from blame, but they petitioned their Member of Parliament that, for the honour of the Burgh, he should at least "disprove the innocence of their guilty neighbours on the west."

During the seventies and eighties, smuggling on the north-east coast was carried on chiefly by Flushing cutters and lug-sailed vessels armed with carriage guns and well manned. They were chiefly employed in running tea, spirits and tobacco, and both vessels and cargoes were the property of merchants residing at Flushing and Ostend. The most prominent of these were the "Endeavour," commanded by Captain Runcie, a native of Down, near Banff; the "Liberty," the "Skirmish" of Portsoy, and two luggers commanded by Andrew Baxter of Fife, and Thomas Robinson of Peterhead, respectively. It was the general practice of the vessels to come close inshore and land their cargoes by their own boats, which were well manned and armed, and protected by the guns of their own vessels.* Being swift sailing ships, they proceeded along the coast disposing of contraband goods at different points, in the very teeth of revenue sloops and cutters. In October, 1780, a number of Aberdeen revenue officers were detailed to prevent smuggling from one of these vessels. Two of the men having come upon the vessel in the act of unloading at Skateraw, received rough handling from the "Flushingers." The ship was hurriedly reloaded to await a more suitable opportunity of running the goods on some other part of the coast. †

* *Customs Letters*, 21st October, 1783.

† *Customs Letters*. Collector to Board, 27th October, 1780..

One of the revenue cutters, the "Experiment," commanded by Alex. Cook, was constantly employed in tracking smugglers, till in February, 1783, in attempting to enter the harbour, it was completely wrecked. A new cutter was built and equipped to take its place at a cost of £185 stg.*

By an Order in Council, the importation of calves' skins into the country was prohibited. In April, 1784, the "Rainbow" of Aberdeen arrived at the port from Bergen with wood, wine and calves' skins, the last mentioned being intended for re-exportation. The authorities believed, however, that the goods were to be smuggled ashore, and in obedience to the Board's order, the skins were carried about two miles out to sea by the Tide Surveyor and sunk to the bottom.† The methods of defrauding the revenue varied. During this same year (1784) the "Providence" of Aberdeen cleared with a cargo of beer for Danzig, but the pilot, instead of carrying the ship to sea, brought her alongside the "Ambassador," which was lying at the new quay near the mouth of the harbour, and loaded with coals from Sunderland, for which coast duty had been paid. It was discovered that coals were transferred from the "Ambassador" to the "Providence," the fraud being committed in order to avoid the overseas duty on the coals.‡

The smuggling of East India goods was common, and about that time it was discovered that a merchant residing in Elsinore had been in the habit of sending over large quantities of these, concealed in false-bottomed chests. In one of these was discovered a quantity of

* *Customs Letters*. Collector to Board, 30th June, 1783.

† *Ibid.* 28th April, 1784; 18th May.

‡ *Ibid.* 6th October, 1784.

cotton and muslin goods, silk napkins, calico and nankeens.

In 1785 the ships of the district which were notably engaged in illicit trading were the "Jean" of Aberdeen, carrying tea and tobacco, the "James" of Newburgh, and the "Charlotte" of Peterhead, carrying spirits. In 1788 the Collector of the Customs reported that with the exception of three months in summer, three luggers and two sloops, with an aggregate tonnage of 350, were constantly employed in smuggling spirits and tobacco. About 100 men were employed, and each of the vessels made about six voyages annually, while not less than 200 hogsheads were smuggled during that time. It was felt that matters would not improve until a great reduction had been made in the duty on these commodities.*

The intricacies of the Navigation Laws gave rise to endless difficulties, and a brief survey of the Aberdeen Customs' records brings to light some of the numerous problems with which the authorities were faced on the arrival of merchant ships at the port. "Seldom," said De Tocqueville, in his *Democracy in America*, "does one come across so much ingenious stupidity in so compact a form." And it is therefore not surprising that the local authorities were often unable to cope with the difficulties which arose, without constant reference to the Commissioners. As the years went on, the machinery of the Navigation Laws became more and more complicated, and the expensive and round-about way in which the exchange of goods between countries was effected, was clearly illustrated by Ricardo in 1847. Simple and natural methods of exchange under existing laws were forbidden. Ricardo takes a case where the

* *Customs Letters*. Collector to Board, 14th January, 1788.

Spaniards desired to import earthenware, the French sugar, and the British wine:

“ The Spaniard would take in a cargo of sugar at Cuba which he would deliver at a French port and take in wine for us ; but we had so arranged that when he arrived at our ports he would be met by a Custom-House officer who would tell him that he could not be permitted to land his cargo. ‘ Why ? ’ the Spaniard would enquire. ‘ I understood you wanted wine ? ’ ‘ So we do,’ the officer would reply. Then the Spaniard would say : ‘ I will exchange my wine for your earthenware.’ ‘ That will not do,’ replied the officer. ‘ It must be brought by Frenchmen on a French ship.’ ‘ But the French do not want your earthenware.’ ‘ We cannot help that : we must not let you violate our Navigation laws.’ ”*

A few illustrations will serve to show how in the eighteenth century various ships coming to the port were guilty of a breach of these laws more often through ignorance than any other cause.

The law that certain articles of European produce could only be imported to the United Kingdom in British ships, or in ships of the country of which the goods were the produce, was sometimes overlooked or open to misconstruction.

The presence of the Duke of Cumberland’s army in Aberdeen at the time of the Jacobite Rebellion gave rise to confusion and disorganization in the work of the Custom House. An examination of the books brought to light the fact that in 1746 salt had been imported from Portugal and tar and wood from Norway in the “ Swallow ” of Rotterdam. The officers pleaded they were under the impression that the Act prohibited the

* *History of Merchant Shipping.* W. S. Lindsay. P. 83.

importation in foreign vessels only of goods produced in Asia, Africa, America, or the Levant.*

Later, John Davidson, master of the " Providence " of Aberdeen, reported his vessel from Campvere with flax, grass seed, almonds, pitch and other articles, the importation of which from the Netherlands was forbidden. The ship was arrested, but as neither skipper nor merchant were aware of the prohibition, application was made to the Board of Customs to liberate the ship.†

With the arrival of the " Venus " in port in February, 1797, another knotty problem was raised. By Act 35 Geo. III, Cap. 100, enforced by sundry later Acts, flax and flax-seeds might be imported " in any ship or vessel belonging to any kingdom or state in amity with His Majesty, from any port or place whatsoever, provided it is navigated by foreign seamen." The " Venus " had sailed from Rotterdam with a cargo of flax, linseed, clover, garden and onion seeds, hides, madder, Geneva toys, etc. On enquiry it was found that the ship had been built in, and belonged to Sweden. The captain had been born at Johnshaven in Scotland, but produced a certificate in the Swedish language showing that he had been admitted a burgess of Gottenburg in 1792; he further declared he had taken the necessary oath of allegiance entitling him to the privileges of a Swedish subject. Two of the crew were natives of Aberdeen and Newburgh respectively, the latter having been released from prison in Holland and obtained a passage in the " Venus " in return for his help in navigating the vessel.

As the Act above cited was loosely worded, and since the captain, having taken the oath of allegiance to

* *Customs Letters*. Collector to Board, 5th August, 1747.

† *Ibid.* 12th January, 1788.

Sweden, was thereby disqualified from being master of a British ship, it did not seem proper to prohibit the importation of the flax, etc., on the grounds that three of the crew were British born. The Customs officers consequently took it upon themselves to permit the discharge of the cargo.*

A slightly different case was that of the foreign built and Prussian owned ship which entered Aberdeen harbour in April, 1798, with a cargo of flax, seeds, etc., from Rotterdam. Finding no precedent for the importation of these commodities in neutral ships from the United Provinces since the passing of Act 35 Geo. III, Cap. 100, the Customs authorities refused to admit the vessel and the cargo until the Board sent instructions.†

The "Dædalus" of Aberdeen, the sole property of John Rae, merchant and shipbuilder in the town, left the port in August, 1797, for Bergen, returning with tar and wood under the command of a Danish master and navigated by two Danish mariners. Doubt arose as to the legality of the importation owing to the fact that the build of the vessel was not that of the country from which the goods were imported.

Again, the "Delight" of Peterhead, a British built ship, arriving from Christiansand with a cargo of timber, was navigated by a British master and four Danish seamen. During a previous voyage from London to the port, the vessel, having been captured by the enemy, was taken to Norway. Her recent purchase necessitated the employment of foreign mariners. Such a case was believed to come under a casualty of war, and was exempted from the usual regulations under a section

* *Customs Letters*. Collector to Board, 2nd February, 1797.

† *Ibid.* 2nd January, 1798; 23rd April, 1798.

of Act 33 Geo. III, Cap. 26. But the master, through ignorance, had failed to conform to one requirement, namely, to obtain a certificate from the British Consul or from two prominent British merchants at the port from which the mariners were engaged. In view of the omission, the Commissioners were asked to decide whether or not the ship should be admitted as a British ship legally navigated.*

Nothing could exceed the complicated nature of the laws dealing with the import and export of corn. For the convenience of trade, Acts were passed from time to time prohibiting the exportation of corn from certain localities. An Act prohibiting the exportation of meal, corn, flour, potatoes, etc., from Aberdeen expired on 7th November, 1796. According to two Acts of the reign, corn, malt, or flour could not be carried coastwise from a port where the exportation was prohibited to one where exportation was allowed, but it was permissible to carry it to a port from which exportation was also forbidden. Several cargoes of flour arrived at Aberdeen after 7th November, i.e., after the expiry of the prohibition from ports where the export of the commodity was still forbidden. According to the law, therefore, the flour could not be discharged at Aberdeen. But as the cargoes had been shipped before the Act expired, though they did not arrive till Aberdeen was once more free to export the goods, the authorities permitted the ships to enter and unload their cargoes.†

* *Customs Letters*. Collector to Board, 17th September, 1799.

† *Ibid.* 15th November, 1796.

CHAPTER VI

PRIVATEERING IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

GREAT Britain's foreign policy in the eighteenth century was almost entirely influenced by imperial considerations. France had a strong hold upon both India and America, and rivalry for these distant possessions was chiefly responsible for bringing Britain into antagonism with France in nearly every war that was fought throughout the century. France was untiring in her efforts to undermine the commercial prosperity of Britain, and the weapon of privateering, successfully wielded by her and by other Continental Powers in a previous age, was employed again with still greater effect to hamper the trade of her strongest opponent. The east coast towns of England and Scotland had to bear the brunt of French depredations, and of these Aberdeen had more than her share. On the whole the period was one of progress, but the port achieved greater commercial prosperity under severe handicap. The Spanish War in 1739, the War of the Austrian Succession, the Jacobite Rebellions, the Seven Years' War, the American War of Independence, the French Revolution, to all appearances remotely connected with a peaceful trading community on the north-east coast of Scotland were, nevertheless, potent factors in the development of the port. Loss of ships and cargoes, appeals for their restitution, for convoys to protect its merchant shipping, for defence against threatened invasion, for protection from the press-gang, were all matters which bulked

largely in the eyes of the municipal authorities, and the trading and seafaring sections of the town. Scarcely a year passed in which Aberdeen did not pay toll in ships or cargoes for Franco-British enmity.

Before the end of the first decade, French privateers had accounted for a considerable number of Aberdeen vessels and Scottish ships laden with the city's merchandise. The "Fortune" of Montrose, bound for Leghorn in 1705 with a cargo of Aberdeen salmon, fell a victim to a privateer of Dunkirk and was carried as a prize to that port.* The following year the "Eagle" galley of Aberdeen, under the command of Alexander Middleton, shared a similar fate. Homeward bound from Leghorn with a cargo for John Gordon & Co. and other Aberdeen merchants, she was attacked by the "Prince de Contie" from St. Malo, captured, pillaged, and detained for four days. Patrick Bannerman, a merchant sailing on the ship, and John Barnett, an apprentice, were delivered up as hostages until the ship should be ransomed for the sum of £600. By virtue of the French king's commission, Middleton obtained a ransom bill to extend for six months, and endeavoured to reach Leith or Aberdeen before the expiry of the bill. But misfortunes overtook him, one after another; contrary winds and the lightness of the vessel, due to depleted cargo, forced the captain to take refuge in Milford Haven. The damage which the cargo sustained, and the fact that his ransom brief was more than half expired, induced Middleton to sail for Dublin. But at Dublin the press-gang was conspicuously active, and as the majority of the "Eagle's" crew were impressed, the captain was prevented from continuing his voyage to

* *Aberdeen Propinquity Books* (Birth-briefs), MSS. 16th June, 1707.

Scotland, and was forced to unload and sell his cargo of wine, oil, currants and raisins, lemons, almonds, Spanish nuts, and marble paving stones.* In 1707 the "Bon-Accord" of Leith, voyaging from Bordeaux to Aberdeen, was overtaken 100 leagues to westward of Ushant and plundered by another St. Malo privateer. Not a few Aberdeen merchants were the poorer financially through the capture of the "Phoenix" on her homeward voyage from Danzig. In 1708, John Drummond, the master of the "Isobel" of Fraserburgh, homeward bound from Norway, was taken aboard a Calais privateer. The ship and cargo were ransomed for £210 stg., but the fate of the skipper remained a mystery.† The plunder carried off from the ship consisted of ankers of brandy, bottles of white wine, an oven weighing 93 pounds, syrup, timber, spoons, and German glass.

The "Providence" of Aberdeen, *en route* for London; the "Bannerman" of Aberdeen, returning home from San Sebastian, laden with wine, oranges and cork; the "Margaret" of Culross, sailing to the port from Gottenburg; the "Isobel" of Aberdeen, bound for Leith with a shipload of meal, all fell into the hands of French privateers during the next two years.

Before that date, three men-of-war had been rigged out to protect Scottish merchant shipping—the "Royal William," "Royal Mary," and "Dumbarton Castle." But for a time Scottish commercial interests outweighed the desire for adequate protection against marauders of the sea, and often the men-of-war were turned to purposes of trade at a time when naval convoys were most urgently required. In February, 1703, the Scottish Government solicited help from the English Admiralty,

* *Aberdeen Propinquity Books* (Birth-briefs), 4th July, 1706.

† *Ibid.* 24th September, 1708; 7th January, 1709.

as the "Royal William," according to custom, had been lent out to Captain Thomas Gordon of Aberdeen and his partners in a trading voyage to the East Indies. The following year Captain Gordon was promoted to the command of the "Royal Mary," and quickly earned the disapproval of his former colleagues, the merchant skippers, by his wholesale impressment of seamen. When her work as convoy ended, the "Royal Mary" was lent to her captain to sail to Italy with a cargo of salmon and herrings. For several years the frigate did duty both as a man-of-war and merchant ship. In her former capacity she was successful in capturing several privateers, one of which was the "St. Trinity" of Ostend, commanded by Jean Sable.* The Ostenders were responsible for the seizure of several Aberdeen ships, and in June, 1705, on the appeal of the magistrates, the Privy Council released the French prisoners taken from Sable's ship by Captain Gordon, in the hope that Aberdeen and other Scottish captives in France might be liberated also. Apparently the plan was successful.

Gordon found the work of privateer-hunting a lucrative one, but on occasion, at the request of the Countess of Errol, he was willing to put "his telescope to his blind eye" when the ship in question contained political agents from the French Court voyaging to Scotland in the interests of the Old Pretender.†

Gordon was not the only Aberdeen captain involved, or suspected of being involved, in political intrigue. In 1706, Patrick Forbes, a well-known merchant skipper, was accused of carrying persons and letters between Scotland and France under cover of trade. The Queen's Advocate made enquiries at the instance of the Earl of

* *The Old Scots Navy*, p. 253 et seq.

† *Ibid.* p. 255.

Mar, whereupon Baillie Gordon of Aberdeen reported that Forbes had gone to Ostend with a cargo of salmon and thence to Campvere. He was well known to Sir Andrew Kennedy, the Conservator, was regarded as a loyal subject, and in the writer's opinion "was not at all fit for carrying out evil designs." Forbes, having returned to Aberdeen on the 12th May, under convoy of the "Royal William" and "Royal Mary," was examined by the magistrates the following day. He furnished a detailed account of his voyage after leaving Aberdeen the previous November; his capture by an Ostend privateer, the pillaging of his ship, its redemption by the owners for half its value, the desertion of his crew and his return from the Continent with a hired one. The ship was searched, but no arms or papers of a suspicious nature were discovered.*

The three frigates of the Scots Navy continued to guard the coast, and so onerous was their task that Scotland had to appeal to the English Navy for help in convoying ships from the Baltic. The men-of-war, with Captain Gordon as commodore, remained under Scottish control until the Union in May, 1707.

The employment of convoys was not always sufficient to ensure the safety of merchant vessels. Storm, unfavourable winds and fog conspired at times to separate the trading vessels from their protectors, leaving them defenceless against the sea-robbers. The "Mary" of Stonehaven, laden with valuable merchandise from Danzig for some of the principal Aberdeen merchants, was seized by the enemy when separated from her convoy by fog.† The "Friendship," another Aberdeen vessel,

* *Mar and Kellie Papers* (Historical MSS. Commission Report), p. 255.

† *Birth-briefes*, 27th May, 1712; 29th May; 20th June.

was becalmed south of Tynemouth and unable to keep up with the convoy of Dutch men-of-war, whereupon a French privateer, sighting the vessel, ran her ashore and set fire to both ship and cargo. Nothing remained save the shell, the anchors, and a quantity of iron, sold for £20 stg.*

After a hazardous voyage, during which the captain, James Mathieson, nearly lost his life, the "George" of Aberdeen was making for Inverkeithing to perform quarantine, when she was chased by a privateer. A boat was manned to intercept her before she reached the shore, but the "George" struck a rock and the crew were rescued by a cobbler from the shore. The vessel was boarded by men from the privateer, but failing to get her off, and driven from the deck by firing from the land, the French were forced to abandon her after collecting and setting fire to a quantity of combustible material. Mathieson, despite physical weakness resulting from vicissitudes he had endured, boarded his ship with the men of the cobbler and succeeded in extinguishing the fire. †

A bold coup was carried out in the road of Aberdeen by the "Neptune" of Calais in September, 1712. Mounting four guns, and under the command of Louis de Villay, the privateer on entering the road fired a gun, while displaying a flag at topmast. In response to the signal, and by reason of the fact that Britain and France were at peace for the time being, two shipmasters and one of the town's officers set forth in a fishing boat to investigate. No sooner had they boarded the privateer than the flag was lowered and the ship put to sea. Captain de Villay turned a deaf ear to all pleas

* *Birth-briefes*, 31st May, 1712.

† *Ibid.* 1st April, 1712.

for liberty, declaring that the prisoners would remain on board until ransomed. Having agreed to pay £100, the Aberdonians were set ashore on the Island of May, where the French captain, with an eye always on the alert for plunder, seized and carried off a number of sheep.*

Throughout the century, the problems which most closely affected the interests of the municipal authorities and the mercantile classes of Aberdeen were those connected with (1) home defence, (2) convoys, (3) impressment. Particularly at the time of the "Forty-Five" and in the subsequent wars of the period did those questions become of paramount importance.

In 1744, when war with France was imminent, the Scottish coasts were infested by privateers. The magistrates of Aberdeen wrote to Sir John Cope begging that troops might be quartered in the city in view of the defenceless state of the harbour, and the town's exposure to incursions of Highlanders from the surrounding country. The dangers had been augmented by the removal from Aberdeen to Dundee of two companies of troops. The fort at the entrance of the harbour was mounted with four cannon, but ammunition was lacking. A demand was made for nine pound shot from Edinburgh Castle until supplies could be obtained from London. The town's guns, fifteen in all, which had done gallant service in previous years had been removed in 1715 or 1716 by government orders. The town could still furnish gunners in the shape of old sailors who for long years had served aboard men-of-war, but it could not afford to purchase guns and ammunition. But their appeals meeting with little response, the magistrates, in the event of the government's definite refusal to grant supplies, decided to

* *Birth-briefes*, 3rd September, 1712.

commission John Aberdein, a merchant in London, to buy ammunition. The proposal was afterwards carried out.*

During the "Forty-Five," the magistrates made it clear that their adherence to the Government could be relied upon. In acknowledging the Marquis of Tweeddale's letter, informing them of the Young Pretender's arrival at Moidart, they made protestations of Aberdeen's unswerving loyalty, and later declared that those who administered the welfare of the city "would take all possible care for preserving the peace and every prudent method for suppressing the disturbers thereof," and would always maintain "the character of a loyal and truly well-affected people to His Majesty and the present establishment."†

News of the march of events reached the town by means of ships sailing to the port. A shipmaster arriving from Skye on 29th March with information of the insurrection brought the additional intelligence that the frigate which carried the Young Pretender to Scotland also landed 22 culverins and some thousands of small arms. It was further reported that the Highland camp consisted of about 3,000 men. The authenticity of the news might be doubted, but it served to alarm the city, and a fresh appeal for arms was made to the Lord Justice Clerk.

Apparently Aberdeen was not judged worthy of the best in the way of war weapons. The supply included 135 firelocks, mostly of Dutch and French make, many of them in bad condition. In September, 1746, they were returned in much better trim than when received.‡

* *Letters Sent from the Burgh.* Vol. II, 2nd March, 29th March, 6th April, 9th May, 1744.

† *Ibid.* 26th and 29th August.

‡ *Ibid.* 8th September, 1746.

Prior to that date, the Council had been induced to ship to Edinburgh Castle, along with Sir John Cope and the transports, their cannon, powder, shot, and small arms for purposes of safety. But as events afterwards proved, their retention would have been wiser. The small arms, taken ashore at Dunbar, fell into the enemy's hands. The gunpowder and muskets, placed on board a man-of-war, were lost with the ship off the east coast. The largest cannon were taken to Berwick, others to Leith, the value of the whole being estimated at £500 stg. All appeals for their restitution were systematically ignored.*

The same difficulty was experienced in procuring convoys. The magistrates sent various communications to the Marquis of Tweeddale in 1744 informing him that several vessels were being loaded at the port with goods for London and Holland, and that the capture of any would occasion great loss to the town. The Provost of Edinburgh was also appealed to on the subject. The magistrates requested that all shipping, both outward and homeward bound, should have regular notice of convoys, that for outgoing ships Aberdeen should be the first point of call, that Montrose and Dundee should next be visited, and that the place for general rendezvous should be the road of Leith. By the Staple contract the states of Zealand were bound to furnish a convoy twice a year in time of war, but the present demand for twenty sail of men-of-war for the British service had drained them of sailors, and made it impossible for them to equip a ship as convoy for at least six months.† Similar missives were sent to the Admiralty. The fact that two of H.M. sloops were detailed to conduct the "trade" south from Leith was small comfort to the

* *Aberdeen Burgh Records* (MSS.). Vol. 61, pp. 212; 278.

† *Letters Sent from the Burgh*. Vol. II, 6th April, 1744.

Aberdonians, since the passage between the port and Leith was equally dangerous.

The Council's fears were not groundless. A ketch bound from Newcastle to Aberdeen was chased into Montrose harbour by a French privateer, her cables cut and the ship carried off to sea. Again, some Newburgh fishermen while casting their lines were approached by two ketches and ordered to come on board with fish. The decks were filled with armed sailors who spoke in English and French. As ships were daily expected from the West Indies, the magistrates were apprehensive lest the privateers should intercept the homeward bound craft. They suggested, therefore, that a frigate should be ordered to cruise north to the Orkneys in readiness to give help if desired.*

As the greatest exporter of its own manufactures of any town on the east coast of Scotland, Aberdeen felt justified in pushing its claims. But neither convoy nor cruiser were forthcoming, and by March, 1745, the Town Council was driven desperate by fresh depredations on the part of the French. A French dogger of 80 tons lay in the bay, seizing all the fish coming to the harbour. Moreover, there was nothing to prevent the vessel from slipping into harbour and carrying off the shipping, under cover of the darkness.†

At length the authorities were informed in April, 1745, that the "Hazard" sloop and the "Happy Janet" lay in Leith road to convoy the transports to Ostend, but still there was no indication that one of the ships intended going as far as Aberdeen, where five vessels with valuable cargoes of manufactured goods "containing a whole year's trade of the town" were about to sail for London.

* *Letters Sent from the Burgh.* Vol. II, 22nd October, 1744.

† *Ibid.* 18th March, 1745.

Continued losses called for more effective protection. Commodore Laurie, then in command of His Majesty's ships in Scotland, was ordered to furnish a cruiser as soon as possible, an order which, apparently, he was unable to execute for some time.*

The following spring, the Prince of Orange undertook to supply two ships as convoys, one to go to Aberdeen and receive orders from the local authorities. But the magistrates had a fresh grievance when it was discovered that the convoy intended remaining at the port only 48 hours before setting sail for Campvere. To make matters worse, the death of the Dutch Admiral retarded the ships' departure, while his successor decreed that only one vessel could be spared. Captain Thomson, a native of Aberdeen, commanded the Dutch convoy, and was ordered to lie in the road of Leith. But the Town Council, in a letter to the Conservator at Campvere, pleaded that Thomson might extend his voyage to Aberdeen and thereby render a signal service to the trade of his native town.† The "Hazard," under Captain Grant, was sent instead to convoy the Aberdeen ships to Leith. From there they sailed under the protection of Captain Thomson's ship, the "Crabend Dyke."

The question of impressment, a practice most detrimental to trade, caused the authorities even greater anxiety. During the forties, several Aberdeen mariners and fishermen were pressed into the King's service, but with the outbreak of war with France in 1756, when the ambition of the French in North America caused a fresh rupture between the two countries, the practice of impressment became a veritable scourge. The Town Council

* *Letters Sent from the Burgh.* April, 1747.

† *Ibid.* Vol. III, 19th March; 16th April, 1748.

in December, 1756, complained that the hardships endured at the port were greater than those of any other coast town in Scotland, owing to the prolonged visitation of a lieutenant of the navy and a press-gang. No vessel could enter the harbour without being boarded, and numbers of the crew captured and carried off to the king's ships. Consequently, shipping was almost at a standstill; Aberdeen could muster only about twelve vessels, employed solely in the coasting trade. Sailors could not be induced to engage from the port, no matter what the wages offered; coasting vessels seeking to enter the harbour were intimidated by the sight of the King's ship; pilots were afraid to venture out in answer to signals even from local ships, while the seizure of one of their number by the "Eagle" tender served to increase their fears.*

It was felt that the burden of upholding the navy should fall equally upon all the seaports. But the press-gang continued to make Aberdeen their headquarters for some time, until in November, 1757, the Admiralty ordered Lieut. Hay to cease impressing seamen at Aberdeen.† The town was willing to bear its fair share in maintaining the navy, and when the crews of two Aberdeen ships bound for London with valuable cargoes were impressed by government tenders at Burntisland, the Council, having the welfare of the navy at heart, did not insist on the restitution of the sailors, but suggested that a sufficient number of hands might be provided from convoys or cruisers to carry the merchantmen to their destination. Further, the magistrates had been fairly assiduous in aiding Hay in his search for men, while Aberdeen was the first town in Scotland to offer, in

* *Letters Sent from the Burgh.* Vol. IV, 9th December, 1756.

† *Letters Received by the Burgh.* Vol. XV, Nos. 159-160.

addition to the government bounty, a reward to all seamen who volunteered for the navy.* So effective was the work of the press-gang that by 1759 not a dozen able-bodied sailors were left in the city. Even landsmen did not escape the common fate. In July, 1757, John Thomson, a cooper, who had never been to sea, but was on the point of sailing to London as a passenger, and James Jaffray, apprentice to Simon Halliday, ship-builder in Aberdeen, were both impressed. In the course of 15 months Lieut. Hay sent 700 seamen from the east coast to the navy, leaving the maritime trade of the country to be carried on by superannuated sailors and apprentices.†

The navy was insatiable in its demands for more men. A new order for impressment in March, 1759, resulted in the commandeering of more men from the port. A certain Captain Carket having arrived in Aberdeen bay to carry off the prisoners from gaol was invited ashore by a number of the baillies and entertained to dinner in the Town House, where "he received his freedom in a hearty glass." But the wily magistrates had an ulterior motive. Discovering Carket to be "an agreeable and frank gentleman," they hoped to procure the release of the Aberdeen whale-fishermen, nineteen of whom had been impressed, in spite of an Act of Parliament forbidding the practice.‡

From 1757 to 1760 the coast swarmed with privateers. A dogger from Boulogne was captured in the bay by the "St. Anne," armed ship. A snow, carrying twelve swivel guns and manned by 90 hands, captured an

* *Aberdeen Burgh Records* (MSS.). Vol. 62, p. 239.

† *Letters Sent from the Burgh*. Vol. IV, 28th and 30th July, 1759.

‡ *Ibid.* 31st July, 1759.

Aberdeen brig homeward bound from Leith. In May, 1758, some Stonehaven fishermen while fishing about 30 miles out were approached by a French ship flying the English colours and were asked how the land bore. The fishermen were kept on board the ship, the "Marischale de Bellisle," until their information was proved correct.*

The following year the menace of a French invasion threatened to become a reality. Information was received that a squadron of six frigates and two cutters with 1,300 men had sailed from Dunkirk to Ostend. The whitefishers of the neighbourhood were warned that if any ships questioned them, they must state that Aberdeen was well furnished with arms and ammunition and her citizens trained to use them.† The city was in some measure justified in its boast, as a new supply of arms and ammunition had been granted.

The whitefishers were valuable at this juncture in collecting intelligence of an approaching enemy. Charles Mackie, the master of a Swedish sloop, informed Captain Antrobus of the "Surprise" man-of-war stationed at Stromness that he had sailed from Gottenburg to the Paternosters in company with Monsieur Thurot, who commanded the French squadron. It consisted of five ships of 44, 38, 32, 26, and 18 guns, together with two armed cutters. Thurot, who had sailed into Gottenburg for provisions, gave out that he had 2,000 troops on board. His destination was generally supposed to be Ireland. Mackie's story was confirmed by other seamen.‡

But false information was sometimes given un-

* *Letters Received by the Burgh.* Vol. XI, No. 206.

† *Letters Sent from the Burgh.* Vol. IV, October, 1759.
Letters Received by the Burgh. Vol. XI, No. 333, etc.

‡ *Ibid.* Vol. XI, Nos. 439--40.

wittingly, through inability to distinguish Thurot's ships from those of Commodore Boyes, who commanded the Scottish squadron. Boyes arranged that after 1st January, 1760, his vessels would be recognized by a Dutch jack at the main top mast-head of his cutters. An "ensign with the jack downwards at the mizzen pike" was to be hoisted as the signal that an enemy ship was on the coast.*

Till 1763, privateers continued to play havoc with ships belonging to or trading to the port. The Peace of Paris concluding the Seven Years' War brought only a lull in hostilities, for in ten years the outbreak of war with the United States brought France and Britain into open conflict once more.

Privateers of America as well as of France combined to harass the coasts. Several Aberdeen ships were captured and ransacked by American privateers, for example, the "Montague," engaged in the Newfoundland trade, and the "Hercules" bound for Philadelphia.† In June, 1779, a number of American ships, sailing from Virginia to Gottenburg, captured a Portsoy vessel near Skye.

The British seaports carried the war into the enemy's country by fitting out privateers, and Aberdeen was not behind her neighbours in that respect. In the spring of 1787, three ships, the "Revenge," the "Liberty" and the "Tartar," left the port to cruise against the Americans and the French. The "Revenge" and "Liberty" were ships of 100 tons' burden, mounted with guns and manned by 40 of a

* *Letters Received by the Burgh.* Vol. XI, No. 456.
Letters Sent from the Burgh. Vol. V, 28th November, 1759.

† *Customs Letters.* (Collector to Board), 17th December, 1776.

crew. The "Tartar" was 60 tons, mounting four guns and manned by 20 men. But the vessels did not justify the expense lavished on their equipment, as they failed to capture a single enemy ship.

Kennedy in his *Annals** states that on 25th May, 1781, two of these vessels were destroyed in Aberdeen bay by the notorious Captain Fell. But according to a report of the Collector of Customs, the "Dreadnought" of Dunkirk, attacked, not the Aberdeen vessels, but the "Liberty," a Leith privateer, and the "Hazard," a London privateer, both lying in the bay at that time. The captains and the majority of the crews were ashore, and the ships fell an easy prey to the enemy despite the fusillade of shots fired from the newly-erected battery at Torry.†

A French privateer which committed numerous depredations along the north-east coast was described by an eye-witness as "a large frigate-rigged vessel with three masts, a small head and white bottom, mounting at least twenty guns, brown bow-tops, yellow upper-works, a red stroke above the gun-ports, black gunnels, a woman's head gilded—a long narrow vessel with a broad stern, swift in speed.‡

The peace which succeeded the American War of Independence was again short-lived. The outbreak of the French Revolution, the violence of which shocked the conservative instincts of England, brought the two countries into conflict in 1793. Again the coasts swarmed with men-of-war and privateers, and a strict watch was kept at the port for enemy ships and enemy

* *Annals of Aberdeen*. Vol. I, p. 310.

† *Customs Letters*. Collector to Board, 26th May, 1781; *Aberdeen Burgh Records* (MSS.). Vol. 64, p. 209.

‡ *Ibid.* April, 1781.

spies. In May, a number of local fishermen boarded, off the north-east coast, a large foreign vessel, believed to be French, copper-bottomed and mounted with 74 guns. The officers wore blue coats with red facings and cockades, some red and white, others yellow and white. At the same time a minute description of two French spies was sent to the port. One was "a young man about 22, thin, fair complexion, light eyes, hair plaited and turned up behind with a comb, rather well-looking, wears a dark blue coat, double-breasted with yellow bottoms, a green and brown striped great-coat, light blue cashmere breeches, boots and a round hat." The other was "an old man about fifty, a thin figure, dark complexion, long face, hair hanging down, stoops a little, wearing a very dark brown great-coat which he wears constantly buttoned, so that it is not known whether he has an under coat or not." *

In this final war of the century, Aberdeen shipping suffered heavily; eleven vessels were captured by French privateers, the "Providence," "Neptune," "Speculator," "Farmer," "Fortune," "Jason," "Martha," "Countess of Aboyne," "Aberdeen," brigantines of from 65 to 165 tons, and two sloops, the "Betsy" and "Isabella," of 60 and 70 tons respectively. †

In 1798, in view of a threatened invasion of the enemy, orders were issued by the municipal authorities for all launches and long-boats belonging to merchant ships to be armed and employed as gunboats at the mouth of the rivers. The shipowners and skippers of Aberdeen reported that of the 100 vessels belonging to the port only 15 were equipped with long-boats or launches, the majority being under 100 tons.

* *Letters Received by Burgh.* Vol. XIV, Nos. 60, 101.

† *Letters.* Collector to Board, 9th September. 1797.

Moreover, all 15 were at sea on foreign voyages and not expected to return for some time. As all the remaining boats were unsuitable for being armed, a plea was made for portable guns and ammunition.*

Contributions were raised throughout the country for national defence, and in Aberdeen the Society of Shipmasters alone voted 200 guineas. The first Aberdeen volunteer company, the Aberdeen Battery Co., was enrolled in 1794 under the command of Captain Arthur Gibbon. The latter made it his chief care that the battery at the harbour mouth should be maintained in a proper state of defence, so that the approach of enemy ships would not be succeeded by the disastrous results of 1781.†

* *Letters Sent from Burgh.* Vol. II, 25th April, 1798.

† *History of Shipmasters' Society*, p. 63 n.

CHAPTER VII

PROGRESS SINCE 1800

THE nineteenth century is an eventful one in the annals of the port. So far as trade is concerned, it may be conveniently divided into three main currents, the first, covering roughly a period of thirty years, being one of fluctuation in and stabilization of trade. The long epoch of warfare with France, culminating in the Napoleonic campaigns, had an injurious effect on the city's commerce. The early years of the century showed a decrease in shipping due to casualties of war, privateering and other impediments to progress, e.g., embargoes on ships and navigation laws affecting belligerent countries. The rapid increase of the coasting trade at the expense of the foreign trade was another feature of the period. Once the port was freed, however, from the embarrassment of war, a period of real development set in.

The second big division from the thirties onwards may be termed the clipper ship era, and marks an age of outstanding prosperity in the history of Aberdeen. The growth of shipbuilding and the evolution of the far-famed clipper bow gave to Aberdeen-built vessels a foremost place in the carrying trade of the world.

With the passing of the sailing ship and the widespread introduction of steamers, the port, by reason of her distance from the coal and iron fields, could not hope to compete with other towns more conveniently situated. The glory of her shipbuilding days declined, but she

found prosperity in another direction ; and in the third period of her development the most striking feature was the amazing growth of the fishing industry, which brought the city into fresh contact with continental ports, and in particular revived her ancient connection with the Baltic.

A.

The last years of the eighteenth century brought greater prosperity to the port, and the crest of the wave was reached in 1801 when Aberdeen doubled its output of ships. Twenty ships (1,843 tons) had been built in 1798 ; the number in 1801 was 42 (3,461 tons). In that year the city headed the list in shipbuilding for the whole of Scotland, Glasgow's output being 18 ships of an aggregate tonnage of 1,905. Aberdeen also possessed 263 ships of 23,574 tons as compared with 236 ships of 18,569 tons in 1798. The following years, however, showed a considerable decline. The number of ships built annually was reduced from 42 to 9 in the year 1809 with a corresponding decrease in tonnage, while in 1810 only 150 vessels of 17,131 tons belonged to Aberdeen. The reduction in shipping was not confined to one town alone, and compared with the other Scottish seaports Aberdeen maintained the position she had won in the opening years of the century.*

Although the worst days of privateering had ended, Scottish shipping still suffered from the depredations of the enemy, and until the final defeat of France in 1815, her ships scoured the seas in search of booty. In 1818 it was reported that 32 ships registered at Aberdeen had been lost, or captured by the enemy. There are few details recorded of the actual ships which had the misfortune to fall into French hands during this period, but

* *Statistics of Navigation and Commerce* (Customs MSS. in P.R.O., London).

mention might be made of two—the “ Rose ” of Peterhead, and the “ Jessie ” of Aberdeen.

In August, 1806, the “ Rose ” arrived in Aberdeen from the Iceland fisheries. Along with two other vessels, the “ Lark,” bound for Archangel, and the “ Molly,” a Greenlander of Hull, she was captured in the North Sea by three French frigates. Either the French commander found the retention of the vessels unprofitable or he placed too implicit a trust in the honour of his captives. The crew of the “ Lark ” and Captain Sadler of the “ Molly ” were placed on board the “ Rose.” Sadler was given the command of the ship and ordered to proceed with her to Liverpool or some other large seaport, where an exchange of men could be effected, and thereafter to depart for France with an equal number of French prisoners.

Sadler, however, landed at Orkney such of his crew as belonged to the Shetlands, and as the vessel had sprung a leak, she was brought into Aberdeen, where the captain gave her in charge, and set out for Hull with the remainder of his crew.*

† The story of the “ Jessie ” is of little interest beyond the link connecting her with the king’s ship which history has so closely associated with Napoleon. In 1814 this little Aberdeen vessel was captured and later turned adrift by an American privateer. She was found at sea in a derelict condition by H.M.S. “ Bellerophon,” and carried into St. John’s, Newfoundland. The “ Jessie ” eventually reached the home port, but the fate of her skipper and crew remained a mystery, though in all likelihood they perished at sea.†

The orders and counter-orders concerning embargoes

* *Customs Letters*, Collector to Board, 15th August, 1806.

† *Ibid.* 26th September, 1815.

on shipping which were issued from time to time not only prevented the free passage of merchandise to and from Aberdeen, but gave rise to endless confusion in dealing with ships from other belligerent and neutral countries. In 1800 an order was issued for the detention of all Russian, Danish, and Swedish ships entering the ports, harbours, or roads of Britain. Only one such vessel arrived within the precincts of Aberdeen port at the time—namely the “Haabet” of Altona, a Danish vessel sailing from Rotterdam. Part of the cargo was discharged before the receipt of the above order. The local authorities feared the embargo would affect trade in neutral vessels, and enquired of the Customs Board whether restrictions applied to Russian, Danish, and Swedish seamen who formed part of the crew of Prussian or other neutral vessels. By preventing such seamen from returning in the neutral vessels in which they arrived, ships not subject to the embargo would be effectually detained, since they had no opportunity of furnishing themselves with other crews in this country. The regulation was intended only to prevent seamen whose ships were lying under embargo from leaving the country in British or neutral ships. Several Danish seamen absconded from their ship detained at Leith and orders were issued for their apprehension. The embargo on Russian, Danish, and Swedish vessels was removed in June, 1801, as also for British ships entering and clearing for Russia and Denmark.*

In the following years an embargo was imposed from time to time, though many classes of ships were exempted from the regulation. One of the chief imports at that time was raw flax from Holland, and numerous discussions arose between the local Customs authorities and the

* *Customs Letters*, Collector to Board, January-February, 1801.

Commissioners regarding the legality of the import in neutral vessels. Special licences were required for flax and seeds, but in spite of the embargo, seeds were permitted to be discharged without licence on the plea of urgent necessity. On one occasion a cargo of flax was unloaded, the owners pleading that since the Board's order, an Act had been passed permitting the free discharge of flax. Yet a licence appears to have been essential until September, 1808, when the order was rescinded.

A contention arose in 1806 over the arrival at Aberdeen of the "Jonge Cornelis" with seed and flax from Rotterdam. The ship's papers showed that the vessel belonged to Papenburg, was German built and owned, and since the embargo did not include German vessels, it was unloaded. The Board, however, declared the ship to be of Prussian build, and ordered the discharge of cargo to be stopped. An Order in Council of 16th April had apparently extended the embargo to all ships "belonging to persons residing in any port or place situated upon the rivers Elbe, Weser, and Ems."

Subsequently the sails of the "Jonge Cornelis" were removed and lodged in the King's Warehouse. In the following month she was permitted to clear for any port not under blockade.*

The foreign trade of the port was thus at a low ebb. Importation of timber from Memel and Gottenburg in ships of Danzig and Christiansand was frequent; cargoes of flax and seeds from Rotterdam and Dorte, when permitted, were discharged from time to time. A good many ships traded from the port to North America, principally to Canada, in the first decade of the century. The "Hannibal," the "Adamant," "Evergreen,"

* *Customs Letters*, Collector to Board, April-July, 1806.

“Ploughman,” “Oscar,” “Bon-Accord,” “Isabella,” “Albion,” “Hope,” were some of the vessels which sailed between Aberdeen and Quebec, Montreal, St. John’s, Pictou. But for the most part, the town’s commercial prosperity rested chiefly on her coasting trade. From 1800 to 1804 not a single ship left the port for the Mediterranean or for any British settlement abroad, while trade with the Sugar Islands was almost at a standstill.*

Prior to 1810 Aberdeen sent to London salmon and cod, stockings and manufactured woollen goods, ale, stones for paving and building; while nearly all the thread, which the city manufactured to a larger extent than any other place, found its way to the Metropolis.

After 1810 the coasting trade grew still more rapidly. Few articles from abroad reached the port direct, being mostly carried coastwise from London, Hull, Newcastle, Leith, and Glasgow. Wheat, barley, coals, wool, salt, flax, lime, tobacco and snuff, tea, cotton-wool, raw materials, oils, dye-stuffs, drugs, china, stoneware, glass, paper, leather, silk and cotton goods, fruits, wines, etc., all reached Aberdeen through the medium of the east coast towns. Whereas in 1818 vessels arriving from foreign parts were 123 in number, the total of ships entering the harbour coastwise was 991. The same year 157 ships sailed to foreign countries and 684 coastwise to Leith, Newcastle, London, and other ports of the United Kingdom. The manufactured goods and all commodities exported abroad in 1816 were valued at £88,049; those shipped to ports in Scotland and England amounted to £400,000.†

The American trade also continued to grow during

* *Customs Letters*, Collector to Board, 5th July, 1804; March, 1809.

† *Annals of Aberdeen*. Vol. II, pp. 214-15.

this period. Between 11th and 27th March, 1818, no fewer than 21 vessels were granted security for the American plantations, 19 belonging to Aberdeen, 1 to Newburgh, and 1 to Banff. From the end of March to the middle of May, at least 20 vessels cleared for Quebec, St. John's, Pictou, and Miramichi.* Emigration to the West brought the port into closer touch with America. From 1810 to 1815 the number of those who emigrated to the British Colonies, to Canada, and the West Indies chiefly, was 589; and to the United States, 45.

In spite of the many improvements of the eighteenth century, the harbour accommodation was insufficient for the growing commerce of the port and country around. In 1809 a plan was submitted by Telford, the eminent engineer, for the conversion of a large portion of the interior of the harbour into a wet dock, and to construct as many dry or graving docks as were necessary for repairing and careening vessels. From 15 to 16 feet of water in the dock would afford ample convenience and admit almost any merchant vessel. By extending the piers further into the sea Telford believed that the additional depth of water thus obtained at the entrance would admit frigates and ships of large dimensions into the harbour. The Act for harbour improvement was obtained in 1810 after a strenuous fight. Telford's plan for the internal reconstruction of the harbour was not carried out at that time, but the North Pier was extended 900 feet seawards at a cost of £66,000, and the South Breakwater built at a cost of £14,250.

The description of the harbour given by the Collector of Customs in 1814 may be quoted as illustrating the many improvements carried out in the preceding years:

* *Customs Letters, circa 1818.*

“ The only quay or pier for loading and landing goods was the ‘ Old Quay ’ adjoining the town on the north and River Dee on the south. It was very commodious for landing or loading goods with safety to the revenue and 1,650 feet long. But by reason of the increase of trade, the additional number and the largeness of the vessels that long ago began to frequent the harbour, the following additional quays have been built—Lime Quay or Lime Basin, consisting of three sides of a square measuring in all 663 feet, appropriated chiefly for vessels using the Lime trade which is fairly extensive; but being very convenient and adjoining the older legalised pier, other goods are laden and unladen in the same basin, coastwise and foreign by special sufferance. Immediately adjoining the said Lime basin is a commodious pier extending S.E. towards the harbour mouth, 940 feet long. There then follows an open space 1,184 feet occupied as building and wood yards where 3 more piers or jetties are built facing the tide and the river Dee, forming 2 basins and presenting a front of 1,414 feet where ships load or unload by special sufferance. These are frequented by the largest vessels or those of greatest draught of water.”*

The following figures show the amount of shipping belonging to Aberdeen between 1810 and 1836.†

Year.	No. of Ships.	Tonnage.
1810	150	17,131
1814	160	23,393
1816	190	30,091
1818	237	36,471

* *Miscellaneous Letters from Collector to Board*, 10th January, 1814.

† *Book of Bon-Accord*. P. 293.

Year.	No. of Ships.	Tonnage.
1821	222	34,235
1825	198	30,771
1826	209	31,671
1827	219	33,196
1828	218	33,572
1829	221	32,858
1830	217	32,497
1831	209	30,460
1832	203	30,392
1833	191	28,096
1834	178	26,489
1835	173	26,063
1836	175	27,274

On the face of it, the statistics of shipping subsequent to 1818 appear to denote a decrease in the commercial prosperity of Aberdeen. In the later years, however, the decline may be partially accounted for by the introduction of steamships, which are not included in the above list. But the reduction in number of ships belonging to the port was due most of all to the rapid decline of the whaling industry.

It has been shown how the whale fishery was pursued in the latter years of the eighteenth century with varying degrees of success. Ultimately the concern made good, and year after year till 1817 the number of ships leaving Aberdeen for the Greenland seas increased. The veterans of the nineteenth century were the "Latona" and "Hercules," each of 236 tons, manned by 30 men and boys, and armed with five carriage guns as a protection against an enemy surprise. The vessels were fitted out with a sufficiency of coal for a six months' voyage, and the surplus stock was sent on the ship's return to the various boiling houses for the manufacture

of the blubber. In 1801 the "Latona," the "Hercules," the "Jean" of Aberdeen and the "Robert" of Peterhead imported into Aberdeen over 326 tons of whale blubber. The following year the "Robert," having been proved unseaworthy, was sold and replaced by the "Hope" of Peterhead.*

Five years later, at the end of the season, five whalers returned to Aberdeen with the produce of over 80 whales and about 50 seals. The capture for 1808 amounted to 120 whales.†

Other Aberdeen and Peterhead vessels were added to the number. In 1811 the "Diamond" of Aberdeen, under the command of Wm. Gibbon, jun., was engaged to go to the Greenland seas in the forthcoming season.

The ship was 371 tons, built at Diamond Harbour in Quebec in 1810, and manned by 18 officers. Two years later, no fewer than 20 vessels in all, belonging to Aberdeen and Peterhead, were engaged in the industry, and there fell to the spear of the harpooner 340 whales.‡

In 1817 five companies were established in Aberdeen, employing altogether 14 ships of 4,379 tons. The number of hands on board amounted to 700, each crew averaging 50 men and consisting of a master, a mate, a surgeon, 6 harpooners, 6 boat-steerers, 6 line-managers, 6 "green-men" or landsmen, 6 apprentices, and 17 seamen. The largest vessel was the "Diamond," the "Hercules" (248 tons) being the smallest; the others in this year were "Bon-Accord," "Elizabeth," "Elbe," "Middleton" (Captain Baxter), "Middleton" (Captain Brown), "Don," "Dee," "Jean," "St. Andrew," "Neptune," "Letitia," and "Princess of Wales." 688 tons of oil were imported.

* *Customs Letters*, 22nd February, 1802.

† *Ibid.* 7th July, 1808.

‡ *Ibid.* Extracts from Letters, 1808-11.

From that date the industry showed a continuous decline until in 1837 Aberdeen possessed only two ships trading to Greenland. Simultaneously with the port's waning prosperity in this trade, Peterhead was developing as a whaling centre. The number of her whaling ships increased, and in 1838 a new Joint Stock Company was formed, called the New Union Peterhead Whale Fishing Company. Whale fishing was not entirely abandoned at Aberdeen till many years later. In 1848 the "Telamingo" appears to have been employed for this purpose, and probably one of the old Aberdeen vessels, the "Neptune," still plied the same trade though under the Hanoverian flag.* The trade was resuscitated for a short time by the formation in 1850 of the Aberdeen Whale Fishing Company, but though for several years regular business was carried on, the industry never assumed anything like its former magnitude. If unimportant from a financial and commercial point of view, the latter years of Aberdeen whaling have an interest all their own by reason of their association with Polar exploration. In the late fifties the "Sophia" and "Lady Franklin" were purchased by the Aberdeen Arctic Company to engage in the whale fishing industry. After being fitted out they were sent in search of Sir John Franklin the explorer, the "Lady Franklin" under the command of Captain Penny, and the "Sophia" under Captain Brown.† Associated with these vessels in the same unhappy quest was the "Fox," a steam yacht built by Alexander Hall & Co., purchased by Lady Franklin and commanded by Leopold McClintock.

Before passing to the second important division, some

* *Customs Letters*, 9th August, 1848.

† *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 31st March, 1897.

account must be given of one other feature in the port's history during the first quarter of the century. If, unlike shipwrecks or privateering, smuggling made no appreciable difference to the shipping of Aberdeen, it had certainly an important effect on the revenue of the port, and so rampant was the practice of running goods at that period that the results were sufficiently serious.

Vigorous efforts were made to stamp out the evil, but before and for some time after the establishment of the coastguard system, the practice of running contraband goods was very prevalent on the north-east coast. Spirits, tobacco, and tea were loaded principally at Flushing, Ostend, and other convenient continental ports on board armed luggers of 100-200 tons, or occasionally, in vessels ostensibly engaged in the lime trade. These vessels made for some of the smaller creeks on the Aberdeenshire coast—Caterline or Skate-raw to the south, or Collieston and Newburgh to the north of the port. On rare occasions contraband goods were landed at Donmouth, but the smugglers preferred the more distant creeks, since before an officer could reach the spot, the running of goods was effected. A run usually occupied about two hours; and the goods were taken ashore in the ship's boats or boats from the adjacent fishing villages. In the work of landing and concealing the goods the smugglers received the ready assistance of fishermen, their wives and families, labourers and farm servants. Collieston and the neighbouring creeks were favourite resorts of the smugglers, and were the scenes of various tussles between Customs officers and the armed crews of luggers.*

Two smuggling syndicates were established at Collieston, each owning two vessels which were in constant use.

* *Customs Letters*, Collector to Board, December, 1803.

One of these continued until 1817 under the direction of two notorious men, Mitchell and Christie. With the assistance of a Folkestone confederate, who kept the north-east coast supplied with contraband goods from the ports of Holland and Zealand, these smuggling receivers carried on a lucrative business till its collapse in 1817. The illicit traffic was carried on and vessels unloaded by a goodly array of fishing boats as regularly and systematically "as the disembarkation of an army." It was said that spirits were sold in every tavern between Peterhead and Aberdeen, and gin and brandy were offered to visitors in every farm and cottar house in the district.

Some of the honest Aberdeen merchants and traders who found themselves handicapped by the undercutting in smuggled goods endeavoured to enlist the help of all fair traders against Mitchell and his gang, whereupon Christie had the temerity to publish in a local paper an advertisement challenging his opponents to do their worst.*

Prior to that period, various methods of prevention had been suggested. The confiscation of contraband goods was felt to be no deterrent to the hardened smuggler, and in 1807 one of the Aberdeen Customs officials, in pointing out that prosecution would more readily solve the problem, suggested the regular inspection of the coasts by riding officers. The latter by keeping in touch with the people who landed and concealed the goods would by threat of punishment force them to disclose the identity of the chief offenders themselves.†

Another suggestion made was to station parties of the military at all the more distant and notorious creeks

* *Aberdeen Journal*, 11th January, 1809.

† *Customs Letters*, 14th October, 1807.

in order to protect the officers in the execution of their duties.

The Scottish Coastguard was established in 1819, but the beneficial effects of the system did not make themselves felt quite so rapidly as some of its advocates sought to maintain. In 1823 an attack was made by the Parliamentary Committee on the Scottish system of prevention. Mr. Arrow, the Inspecting Commander of Coastguard in the Aberdeen district, in answer to reflections made against it, lauded the system, especially as conducted by him on the north-east coast, and maintained that he and his officers had completely broken up the contraband trade. As an illustration of the fear which his methods had inculcated in the delinquents, he declared that a man called on him one night and made the following statement:—

“ I am employed by the smugglers. You know we have had a vessel on the coast the last thirteen nights and that we want to land near Aberdeen. For the love of God, let her come in and give us fair play. You take what you can; let us get off with what we can or she will go away altogether as she cannot keep on this coast any longer.” *

The vessel, Mr. Arrow stated, was forced to go to sea, and was wrecked on one of the eastern islands.

Apparently, however, the smugglers were not easily cowed. From 1821 to 1823 numerous vessels were seen hovering off the north-east coast. In October, 1821, a cutter or sloop of 50 tons, commanded by David Pultey, was reported to be making for the Aberdeen coast with nothing aboard save secret stores of tobacco and tea. Later another smuggler was sighted north of Girdleness

* *The King's Customs*, H. Atton and H. H. Holland, p. 127.

and described as a "long low black fast-sailing lugger, having three lugsails set and a main topsail."*

Cargoes of spirits were run at Belhelvie and Muchalls, while for over a year, Dangerfield, the noted Folkestone smuggler, had been seen at different creeks in the district, where he endeavoured to procure new partners in his trading concerns. Two Aberdeen grocers, James Hay and James Leys, and James Brown, a farmer in Belhelvie, threw in their lot with the enterprising smuggler.†

Ten years later, the system introduced for preventing illicit trading appears to have thoroughly justified its existence. Reports from the Aberdeen Custom House at that period give evidence of its almost entire suppression for the time being at least. Smuggling at the port, though it never ceased entirely, was never carried on again in the wholesale manner which prevailed during the first quarter of the nineteenth century. For a number of years, however, complaints reached Aberdeen, from Peterhead chiefly, against the opportunities afforded for smuggling by French vessels engaged in the herring industry off the Scottish coast. The French luggers on their way to the north were in the habit of entering Peterhead harbour ostensibly on business connected with the fishing, in reality to deposit quantities of contraband goods.‡ As far as the taking of fish was concerned these vessels had no right to come within three miles of the coast. But the privilege of curing the fish in British harbours gave the foreign ships the opportunity they required, and one which they not infrequently abused.

* *Miscellaneous Letters from Collector to Board*, October, 1821; April, 1823.

† *Customs Letters*, Collector to Board, 29th April, 1822

‡ *Ibid.* 26th April, 1841, etc.

French vessels were for a time in the habit of proceeding from port to port retailing cargoes of fruit, etc., and thus securing greater facilities for smuggling. The practice of vessels from abroad calling at various ports on the coast was an infringement of the law and one which the authorities were constantly up against.

Numerous instances of the abuse of ships' licences occurred. In the early years of the century two of the Aberdeen whaling vessels exceeded the bounds of their licences by making voyages to St. Petersburg for cargoes of hemp. Again "The Sisters" of Peterhead, employed in the mercantile trade to foreign parts, was discovered to have shipped coals from Sunderland to Peterhead. Another instance was that of the "Matilda" from Archangel, in 1834, which discharged at two ports before unloading the greater part of her cargo at Aberdeen. A vessel sailing from a foreign port and calling at as many as three ports on the coast was stated to have converted the voyage into a coasting one and therefore to have committed a breach of law.

B.

In the first quarter of the nineteenth century the shipbuilding industry at Aberdeen, formerly of small dimensions, began to assume considerable proportions, and the tonnage turned out in one year was something like two-thirds of the total tonnage of the port in 1780-90.

Six shipbuilding yards were in operation, the most prominent being those of Alexander Hall & Co., founded in 1790, William Duthie, and Messrs. John Vernon and Sons. Of minor importance were Nicol & Reid, Ronald and Shepherd, and John Duffus & Co.

The last-named firm (later merged into Blaikie Bros., and now defunct) laid claim to the distinction of having built Aberdeen's first steamer, the "Queen of Scotland,"

built in 1829 for the Aberdeen Steam Navigation Co. A paddle steamer with wooden hull, it was constructed for the London trade, and in the succeeding eleven years was followed by four similar ships from the same firm: the "Duke of Wellington," "North Star," "City of Aberdeen," and "Duke of Sutherland."*

The firm of Messrs. John Vernon & Sons is associated with the first of Aberdeen's iron ships, the "John Garrow," of 800 tons, which was built and launched from their yard in 1837.

The firm of Messrs. J. Duthie, Sons, & Co. was founded by William Duthie about 1815. In addition to his business of shipbuilding, Mr. Duthie was a timber merchant, ran several vessels in the American trade, others in the guano trade, and was the first shipowner to establish a regular mercantile service between London and Australia. The "Australia," "Abergeldie," "Brilliant," "Windsor Castle," and "Ballarat," which made a record run to Sydney in 64 days, were some of the fine ships turned out by these builders.

But the leading place in shipbuilding was taken by Messrs. Alexander Hall & Co. Founded in 1790, the firm soon established a reputation for wooden craft, although no record of vessels built by the Company exists prior to 1811, when the "Glasgow Packet," of 82 tons' register, was turned out. From that date until 1877 the firm built 290 ships, ranging in size from 20 to 2,600 tons. The "Edinburgh Packet" for the Leith and Clyde Shipping Co. followed in 1812, while six years later came the "Asia," a ship of 528 tons, the wonder of her day, and the largest ship of her time built at Aberdeen. During the next 25 years the firm turned out such vessels as the "Cock of the North" for Messrs. Hogarth & Co. in

* From papers belonging to Messrs. Alex. Hall & Co.

1835, the iron schooner "Prince of Wales" and the "Don," the "Scottish Maid" in 1839, the precursor of the great clipper ships, and the "Glentanar" in 1842. In the construction of the last-named, the firm broke all records for speed in workmanship. The timber was floated down the Dee from Glentanar, then leased by Hall & Co., and in six weeks' time the ship was completed, launched, and sped on her way to America in order to secure and deliver a cargo of guano before the date fixed for the imposition of an increased duty on that commodity. The record for quick execution has never since been equalled by this or any other firm.*

The year 1839 saw the establishment of another famous shipbuilding firm, that of Walter Hood & Co., which remained in existence till 1881. From its commencement till the launching of the "Orontes," the last of Hood's ships, from 35 to 40 wood, composite, and iron vessels were built. The firm shared with Hall & Co. the honour of producing the majority of those clipper-built ships which placed Aberdeen in the front rank among shipbuilding ports.

The development of shipping companies was another notable feature of the great shipbuilding era. The oldest of these, the Aberdeen Steam Navigation Co., dated from a period long before the advent of steam. A regular service of swift-sailing smacks was established in 1707, and in the middle of the century, in addition to general cargo, large quantities of granite were shipped to London. The first steamer launched from an Aberdeen yard was built for the Company in 1829, and followed by others already noted. In 1844 the "City of London," an iron paddle steamer, was constructed on the Clyde, and two years later the "Earl of Aberdeen,"

* From information supplied by Messrs. Alex. Hall & Co.

both for the Company. These ships, whose tonnage was over 1,100, were the largest built at that time on the Clyde. Further progress was made when nine years later an iron screw vessel, the "Duke of Rothesay," was built for the Steam Navigation Co.* A modern example of steamers owned by them is the "Hogarth" of 1,225 tons, which was mined during the recent war.

The North of Scotland, Orkney and Shetland Steam Navigation Co. began its career in the last years of the eighteenth century under the title of the Leith and Clyde Shipping Co. On its amalgamation with the Aberdeen, Dundee and Leith Shipping Co. in 1810, the name was changed to the Aberdeen, Leith, Clyde and Tay Shipping Company. In 1820 eight smacks were employed in the coastal and continental service. In that year a company was formed in Leith to run a competitive steamboat. To maintain their prestige the Aberdeen company ordered the construction of a paddle steamer, 200 tons' register. The "Velocity," built on the Clyde, was the first regular trading steamer in Aberdeen, but it had to be reconstructed before it was thoroughly successful. The two rival companies eventually decided to cooperate in running their vessels; subsequently the "Velocity" and the "Brilliant" (the Leith steamer) each made three complete journeys weekly, leaving their respective ports on alternate days. In this way the companies ran practically a daily service.

The Aberdeen company still continued to build wooden smacks, but in 1826 bought the "Brilliant" for £5,000. In the course of the next few years the trade had extended to Cromarty and Inverness, later to Wick, Thurso, Orkney and Shetland. The "Fairy," a wooden schooner built by Hall & Co., carried mails to

* From papers belonging to Alex. Hall & Co

the Shetlands till 1858. The later vessels owned by the Company included "Sovereign," "Newhaven," "Queen," "Duke of Richmond"—lost in Aberdeen bay in 1847—all wooden ships, "Prince Consort," "Hamburg," and "Vanguard." Their modern successors were the "Earl of Zetland," "Queen," "St. Clair," "St. Nicholas," "St. Magnus," "St. Sunniva," "St. Rognvald," stranded in April, 1891, "St. Ola," and "St. Giles."* Most of the earlier ships were built on the Clyde; nearly all the later ones were the work of Messrs. Hall, Russell & Co., Aberdeen.

In 1837 the Aberdeen Commercial Company, consisting of over 60 partners, was formed for the purpose of carrying on trade in general, but particularly in lime and coals. In subsequent years numerous vessels were built at the port for that company.†

Steamer communication with the Moray Firth ports was started at a much later date, with the formation of the Aberdeen, Leith, and Moray Firth Steam Shipping Company in 1881, and later, through a Glasgow shipping company, the port was linked up with Liverpool. Starting with one small ship, the service increased in twenty years to five large steamers.

Mention has already been made of the "John Garrow," the first iron ship built at Aberdeen. Among its successors were the "Celestial," afterwards the "Mercury," employed in the coal trade, and the "Centaur."‡ But iron shipbuilding had little real prosperity till about 1866, when it was revived by local firms. In 1867 Messrs. Hall, Russell & Co. started iron shipbuilding, and in the following years turned out over

* From papers belonging to Alex. Hall & Co.

† *Customs Letters*, Collector to Board, 1st July, 1837.

‡ *Aberdeen Journal*, 8th December, 1877.



“SCOTTISH MAID.”

First Clipper Ship built in Aberdeen, 1839.

From a painting by J. Fanner, 1888.

100 vessels of a total tonnage of 91,000, and valued (with machinery) at £2,000,000.

But in the annals of nineteenth century shipbuilding at Aberdeen, it is not so much the expansion of the industry generally or the substitution of iron for wood and steam for sails that stands out prominently, but the wonderful evolution of the clipper ship.

The schooner "Scottish Maid," built in 1839 by Alexander Hall & Co. to compete with the paddle steamers between Aberdeen and London, was the pioneer of the "clipper" built ships, those swift-sailing vessels, sharp at the bows, graceful in line, fining away towards the stern, contrasting strangely with the bluff bows and full lines of their frigate-built predecessors, and attaining in construction, speed and beauty, the highest pinnacle of the shipbuilders' art. The "Fairy," the "Rapid" and "Monarch," built by the same firm in 1842, were of a similar type to the "Scottish Maid."

But these earlier experiments could not compare with the class of ship which later developed through competition with other nations, particularly the United States. The significant feature in the evolution of the clipper ships was their increasing dimensions and expanse of canvas. From ancient times, large ships had been constructed solely to carry heavy cargoes and were veritable "ships of burden," whereas those intended for speed were invariably small like the Mediterranean galley, the Spanish caravel, the French lugger, or the English cutter. But the clippers in their perfected form combined the size of the heavy ships with the speed and lightness of the small ones.

The early clippers were of a smaller type, e.g., the Baltimore clippers, modelled on the French lugger. At the opening of the nineteenth century these ships were

the finest of their kind in any country. Originally fitted out as privateers, they were later employed in the opium trade to China, and were eminently suited to carry a cargo, the value of which far exceeded its weight and bulk. For years the Baltimore clippers had no equal, but the success of America in the exceedingly risky but equally lucrative opium trade fired the commercial spirit of other nations, and a number of British firms joined in the enterprise.

One of the vessels sent to compete with the American opium clippers was the schooner "Torrington," built by Alex. Hall & Co. in 1845 for Jardine, Matheson & Co. She was the first British clipper to enter the China Seas.*

To realise the dangers and difficulties incurred in the opium trade, a trade in which speed, skilled seamanship and daring enterprise were the great essentials, one requires only to read the fascinating description given by Mr. Lubbock in his book *The China Clippers*. The following extract illustrates the nature of the work undertaken by some of the clippers—the pick of the ships stationed along the coasts of China ready to receive the prohibited drug brought from India:—

"They had the duty of carrying the opium to places where no treaties or agents existed. Theirs was the most arduous and exciting task of all. They had to meet the Chinese opium smugglers in lonely creeks which had never been surveyed, knowing that these same smugglers would be only too ready to capture their clipper if given the chance or to loot her and murder her crew if she stranded. They had to circumvent the wiles of hostile mandarins, defend themselves not only against war junks but fleets of Chinese pirates,

* *Aberdeen Journal*, 1877. *The China Clippers*. Basil Lubbock. P. 33.

weather the dreaded typhoons, and if damaged refit themselves at sea; open up new trade with far-away and unknown ports, survey new coasts and harbours, carry mails and despatches and even negotiate treaties."*

Of all the British clippers engaged in the opium trade the "Torrington" was one of the most notable, and as a swift-sailing ship proved a great credit both to her builder and the port from which she was launched. But the fame of Aberdeen was based on the great tea clippers.

The repeal of the British Navigation Laws in 1849, by throwing our foreign markets open to the world, brought the British mercantile marine into direct competition with that of other nationalities. The American clippers seized the opportunity of entering the British tea trade, in which for a time they held supremacy, and wrested the tea trade of London almost entirely out of the hands of English shipowners. The American clippers raced across the Pacific to China, loaded and left port with full cargoes under the eyes of British vessels which had lain for weeks in harbour. Moreover, they conveyed the tea to British ports at double the rate of freight that British ships could command.†

The British began to realise that in order to prevent complete extinction in a valuable branch of their trade, they must bestir themselves to fresh efforts. A definite step was taken when in 1850 the firm of Jardine, Matheson & Co. ordered Messrs. Hall of Aberdeen to build a vessel which should combine the fine lines and heavy rig of the American ships with the superior strength of our own. The result was the production of

* *The China Clippers*, p. 4.

† *Naval Science*, article on Clipper Ships by Wm. John, Vol. II (1873), p. 265.

the first of the famous Aberdeen clippers—the “Stornoway” (506 tons). It was quickly followed by the “Chrysolite,” built for Messrs. Taylor & Potter of Liverpool. These vessels were commanded by crack racing skippers, the former by Captain Robertson, the latter by Captain Antony Enright, late of the “Reindeer,” which in 1850 made a record voyage to China and back in 7 months 28 days, and was the first to arrive with the new teas.

The “Chrysolite” started on her maiden voyage in 1851, reached Hong Kong in 102 days, and with her cargo of tea made a magnificent run home, overtaking first the “Memnon,” then the “Havannah” and “Fly,” three noted American racing clippers, and arriving in Liverpool after a voyage of 103 days from Whampoa.*

The 1852 race between the “Stornoway” and “Chrysolite” was noteworthy. The vessels kept together for 45 days in all, but the “Chrysolite” was favoured by the best winds in the latter part of the voyage, and reached Liverpool on 22nd October after a run lasting 104 days, and three days before the arrival of the “Stornoway.”

The British clippers were still scarcely equal to their American rivals, but in 1852, Hall & Co. built the “Cairngorm,” a 1,250-ton clipper, the first to equal, if not surpass, the speed of any American competitor. Moreover, owing to her strength of build, she was able to deliver her cargo in better condition, and henceforth she and her successors obtained a preference.

In 1855 the “Robin Hood,” “Friar Tuck” and “Schomberg” were launched at Aberdeen, all fine clippers but short-lived. The “Schomberg” (2,600

* *China Clippers*, pp. 111-117.

tons), built for the Black Bull Line of Australian traders to compete with America in the Australian trade, was the largest ship built at Aberdeen up to that time.* She left the port *en route* for Liverpool to load for Melbourne under the command of Captain Forbes, formerly of the "Marco Polo," but unfortunately she was wrecked on an uncharted reef and totally lost during her maiden voyage.

The clippers were not exclusively used in the China tea trade. Some of the finest vessels of the age traded to Australia, and the Aberdeen White Star Line, owned by Messrs. George Thompson & Company, whose magnificent fleet of clippers was built by Walter Hood and Co., brought Aberdeen to her highest pinnacle of fame in the shipbuilding world.

The firm of Messrs. George Thompson & Co., one of the oldest in Scotland, was established in the twenties and carried on business as shipowners, insurance brokers, under-writers, timber and guano importers. Their substantial and well-built vessels, under able commanders and manned by skilled seamen, traded to all parts of the world. With the growth of the British Colonies and the opening up of China, the expansion of trade thus produced called for the use of ships of increased tonnage and greater dimension. The firm's connection with Australia began in 1848, and the pioneer of the White Star clippers was the "Phœnician," the first regular trader to Australia. In the next ten years Hood & Co. built for Messrs. Thompson the "Oliver Cromwell," "John Bunyan," "Centurion," "Walter Hood," "Maid of Judah," "Omar Pasha," "Star of Peace," "Wave of Life," "Damascus."†

* *Aberdeen Journal*, 8th December, 1877. Also papers belonging to Alex. Hall & Co.

† *Futtie, Past and Present*. D. Mearns. P. 36.

The later vessels of the Line include the "Nineveh," "Ethiopian," "Jerusalem," "Thyatira," "Thermopylæ," "Miltiades," "Salamis," "Aristides," "Patriarch," "Pericles," "Sophocles," and "Orontes." There were no finer clipper ships afloat than those engaged in the wool trade between Britain and Australia, and it is interesting to remember that many of the Aberdeen-built ships navigated the coasts of Australia when Melbourne and Adelaide were mere villages.*

Another famous shipping line dates from the middle of the century—also the Aberdeen Line—owned by Messrs. John T. Rennie & Sons, who commenced a service of fine clipper ships between London and Natal in 1854. The first sailing ship, "L'Imperatrice-Eugénie" of 251 tons, was built on the Clyde, and made many voyages till lost in 1867 in Algoa Bay. Of its successors some were iron and some wood, the "Natal Star," "Tugela," "Umgeni," "Illoro," "Ifafa," "Natal," "Mantzburg," built by Hall; the "Umvoti" by Hall, Russell; and "Prince Alfred" by William Duthie, between 1862 and 1875. In addition, the Line possessed in its early days two small coasting steamers, the "Madagascar" and "Waldensian," trading between Cape Town and Port Natal and running the first mail service on the coast. The "Madagascar" was built in Greenock, but its engines were supplied by an Aberdeen firm. It was chartered for the Government transport service during the Crimean War and engaged in carrying mules from Gibraltar to the Crimea. In 1856 it was brought to Aberdeen, fitted out for the South African coasting trade, and sailed from the port direct to the Cape. The ship was engaged in the trade

* *Aberdeen Journal*, 28th February, 1887.

till December, 1858, when it was lost at the mouth of the Beta river. After the further loss of the "Waldensian" in 1862, Messrs. J. T. Rennie reverted to sailing ships.*

Meantime competition between clippers employed in the tea trade continued. With the ousting of the Americans, the fight for supremacy was carried on by British designers, and for some time the Clyde built clippers were unrivalled. Such vessels as the "Sir Lancelot," "Taeping," "Taiting," "Ariel," and "Serica," were hard to beat, and according to some authorities were unequalled until the launch of the "Thermopylæ" again brought Aberdeen to the front.

The tea clippers were at their best in the sixties. "Keen as a knife-blade below the water-line, yet swelling gracefully into proportions good for stability, rigged to a loftiness that would stunt by comparison the four-masted leviathans of the present day" (1892), the fleet was unparalleled in the history of sailing ships.† To that type belonged the masterpieces of the Aberdeen builders—the "Flying Spur," "Black Prince," "Fychow," and "Yangtze" of Hall & Co., or "Jerusalem," "Thyatira," and "Thermopylæ" of Hood & Co.

The racing clippers loaded their tea cargoes at Foochow, and the splendid fleet as it assembled in the harbour was a sight to gladden the hearts of all seafarers and those interested in mercantile enterprise. The ships with their "glistening black hulls, snow-white decks, golden gingerbread work, carving at bow and

* From information supplied by Messrs. J. T. Rennie and Sons, London.

† *English Illustrated Magazine*, article on Clipper Ships, by Herbert Russell.

stern, newly varnished teak deck-fittings, glittering brass and burnished copper ” were things of dazzling beauty, and in all the fine array none could compare with the loveliness of the White Star clippers—the “ Jerusalem,” or the “ Thermopylæ,” the wonder of the world. “ Their green sides,” says Mr. Lubbock, “ white figure-heads, white blocks, white lower masts, bowsprit and yardarms, gold stripe and gold scroll work were the admiration of sailors wherever they went.”*

The “ Thermopylæ ” (947 tons), 210 feet in length, 36 in breadth and 21 deep, was launched in 1868, and made her first voyage to Melbourne in 60 days, averaging a daily run of 178 miles. Her record day’s run was 380 statute miles, a feat exceeded by no sailing ship before or since. The clipper was commanded by the keen, enterprising and fearless Captain Kemball, whose reputation was based on the exploits of his former ship, the “ Yangtze,” winner of the tea race in 1867. The interest and excitement which always attended the tea races were doubled when it became known in 1869 that the “ Thermopylæ ” had been chartered to sail from Australia to Foochow and load teas for London. Three ships broke the record in the race home, namely “ Sir Lancelot,” “ Thermopylæ ” and “ Titania,” but Aberdeen failed to beat the Clyde, the “ Sir Lancelot ” carrying off the palm by an 89 days’ voyage to the “ Thermopylæ’s ” 91.†

Nevertheless, no ship built on the Clyde, save, perhaps, the “ Cutty Sark,” could dispute the “ Thermopylæ’s ” position as the fastest sailing ship in the world. For years the two clippers were rivals, and there was little to choose between them. The

* *China Clippers*, p. 339.

† *English Illustrated Magazine*.

“ Thermopylæ ” made the best passages during the seventies, the “ Cutty Sark ” during the eighties.*

Ere that time, however, the great days of the racing clippers had begun to wane. The last tea clipper built in Aberdeen was the “ Caliph ” in 1869, but soon the strong combination of steam and the Suez Canal proved too powerful for the sailing vessels. By 1871 the fleet was scattered widespread over the seas, and only three of the great clippers remained in the tea trade. In subsequent years tea freights dropped to such an extent that the finest of the ships found tea-loading unprofitable. The last voyage of the “ Thermopylæ ” in that trade was made in 1878, but she had a long and varied career. She remained in the service of her original owners, the Aberdeen White Star Line, till 1890, when she was sold to a Montreal firm and engaged in the rice trade between Rangoon and Vancouver.

Her reputation as a swift sailer was maintained until her last run under the British flag in 1895, after which she was sold to the Portuguese Government and did duty as a training ship at the mouth of the Tagus. But by and by, old age and limited accommodation rendered her unfit even for that service. In 1912 the “ Pedro Nunes,” formerly the “ Thermopylæ,” the greatest of the clippers, was towed out to sea and sunk by two Portuguese men-of-war.† So ended the pride and glory of the Aberdeen clippers.

With the passing away of the Aberdeen clippers, the port's greatness as a shipbuilding centre began to decline. With the clippers departed also the “ high art called seamanship ” and the beauty and romance of sea life. To the modern maritime age, accustomed to the “ dirty

* *China Clippers*, p. 339.

† *Aberdeen Journal*, 23rd May, 1913.

British coasters with their salt-caked smoke-stacks," the clipper sailing ships stand on a plane apart, to be ranked in the annals of romance with the "stately Spanish galleon or quinquireme of Nineveh."

The "Alexander Nicol," a three-masted schooner built for the Aberdeen Lime Company in 1876 was the last of the home-built sailing ships which traded from the port. In 1909 only 20 sailing vessels bore the name of the city as their port of registration, and of these only three were built at Aberdeen, i.e., the "Inverurie," built by Hall & Co. in 1889, the "Port Jackson," training ship constructed by the same firm in 1882, and the "Umvoti," built by Messrs. Hall, Russell, in 1869.

Under the new order, the two Lines owned and registered at Aberdeen have maintained their position in the carrying trade of the world. All improved methods of propulsion and shipbuilding have been adopted. Two magnificent products of the White Star Line were the screw steamer "Aberdeen" (3316 tons) and her sister ship the "Australasian," built on the Clyde. The vessels were designed to carry general cargo and passengers with the maximum of speed and the minimum of risk. Towards the close of the century the Aberdeen Line consisted of a fleet of close on 20 vessels with a tonnage of 24,000, almost one-fourth of the entire tonnage of vessels belonging to the port.*

The splendid steamers built by Messrs. Hall, Russell for J. T. Rennie's South African cargo and passenger service, have done much to resuscitate the shipbuilding industry in Aberdeen. These included the "Matabele," the first triple expansion steamer to sail to South Africa, and the "Inanda," the first ship lighted by electricity employed in the trade. A later "Inanda" was the

* *Aberdeen Journal*, 28th February, 1887.

first of the South African ships to be fitted with wireless.* The "Intaba," launched from the yard of Messrs. Hall, Russell in September, 1910, and the fifteenth ship built by the firm for the Rennie Line, was the largest vessel built at Aberdeen, being 4,700 tons gross register. †

From the thirties onwards, the statistics for trade and shipping at Aberdeen show a steady improvement. In the fifteen years, 1832-1847, the revenue of the port increased from £56,000 odd to £88,000, notwithstanding a great reduction in import duties. Increase in population, in consumption of imported goods and in trade generally, marked these and subsequent years. Fluctuations naturally occurred from time to time, due principally to political and economic conditions in Europe. For example, the year of Revolutions (1848) had a detrimental effect on Aberdeen's commercial prosperity. The importation of flax and other raw materials decreased, and in consequence the linen, woollen, and cotton factories of the city were temporarily closed or working on half time. During the Crimean War, trade did not suffer to any great extent; Denmark and Prussia replaced Russia in supplying the port with commodities. But in the early sixties the Danish War, and consequent blockade, affected trade by greatly reducing the quantities of grain shipped to Aberdeen from Stettin, Königsberg, and Danzig.

But generally speaking, prosperity was the dominant note of the century. The formation of the Victoria Dock in 1848 had a beneficial effect on the shipping and revenue of the port. An officer of the Royal Navy

* From information supplied by Messrs. J. T. Rennie and Sons, London.

† *Aberdeen Free Press*, 7th September, 1910.

declared in 1850 that the docks were "equal to any in the kingdom, and the facilities afforded for landing and shipping of goods would ensure an increasing trade both foreign and coastwise."*

In 1855 the port possessed 234 vessels (of 58,232 tons), the following year 247 (61,945 tons), and in 1857 the number increased to 267 (70,401 tons).

Large quantities of timber were imported from the Baltic ports and Norway, and several additional pieces of ground were leased from time to time as woodyards for storing the rapidly accumulating timber. Ships arrived in port at very frequent intervals laden with corn, chiefly from Prussia. The South American guano trade was a growing concern, while cattle and sheep were imported in increasing numbers from Canada until the early nineties, when the import of Canadian live-stock was prohibited. Cargoes of guano from Callao, nitrate of soda from Chili, locust beans from Cyprus, bones and bone ash from Buenos Ayres, Monte Video, Rosario, Alexandria, St. Petersburg, and many other parts of Europe; moss litter from Harlingen in Holland, linseed from Calcutta and Bombay, maize from New Orleans, New York and Baltimore, and esparto grass, were the chief commodities shipped to Aberdeen in the seventies and eighties. In the year 1885 one shipping company alone imported eleven cargoes of esparto from Spain, Algeria, and Tripoli. The paper mills owned by Messrs. Pirie & Sons had developed rapidly since about 1820. The other important industries of the period were Hadden's Woollen Factory, Richard and Co.'s Flax Works, Stewart's Comb Works, and one or two iron works, which, with the paper mills, were, perhaps, the

* *Customs Letters, Miscellaneous Letters, Collector to Board, 1850.*

most flourishing of the Aberdeen manufactories, particularly during the sixties.

The following figures give the number of vessels entering and clearing from the port both in the foreign and coasting trade, during the latter half of the nineteenth century.*

Year.	Foreign Trade.		Coasting Trade.	
	Vessels Inwards.	Vessels Outwards.	Vessels Inwards.	Vessels Outwards.
1855	193	10	1,578	953
1856	200	10	1,595	976
1857	192	5	1,784	1,112
1858	219	6	1,821	1,139
1859	235	14	1,792	1,160
1860	254	14	1,881	1,110
1861	280	15	1,892	1,173
1864	311	17	1,851	1,115
1867	317	20	1,751	775
1870	395	24	1,823	710
1875	320	76	1,489	1,081
1880	356	114	1,833	1,071
1885	260	80	2,098	1,361
1890	319	126	2,304	1,375
1893	340	148	2,785	1,701
1897	330	152	2,817	1,873
1900	260	101	2,850	1,924

In addition to the general improvement of trade and increase of shipping at the port, these figures indicate certain other salient features of Aberdeen's commerce.

One is the smallness of the export trade to foreign countries. Practically all the goods were shipped to other ports in the kingdom and exported thence. The exports, therefore, went to swell the coasting trade.

In the course of 45 years the number of vessels from

* *Custom House Papers.* From Statements of Trade sent from Collector to Board.

foreign countries entering the port annually increased from 193 to 360. The number in 1870 was 395, and the fact that from that year till the end of the century the number of ships arriving at Aberdeen was never so high would seem to suggest a decline in trade. But if the ships were fewer in number they were larger in size. The aggregate tonnage of the 395 vessels entering the port in 1870 was 70,185. Five years later only 320 vessels arrived from foreign parts, but their tonnage amounted to 73,695, while the 260 ships of the year 1885 had a gross tonnage of 96,912, and the 319 of 1890 amounted to 140,899. These included both steam and sailing ships.*

The growth of the coasting trade, as compared with the foreign, was even more marked in the latter half of the century than in the first half. Aberdeen abandoned her direct import trade in many commodities, and whereas in the eighteenth century her merchant ships had sailed to the plantations carrying loads of home-manufactured articles and returning with tobacco from Virginia or sugar from the West Indies, in the nineteenth century such articles of consumption were shipped indirectly from other ports. From 1873 to 1877 Aberdeen imported over one million pounds of tobacco, not one pound of which came direct from abroad, but was all sent coastwise from the English ports.

C.

The greatest development in the coasting trade is found in the last twenty years of the century, an increase due largely to the rapid growth of the fishing industry at Aberdeen. Its establishment as the chief centre of the Scottish fish trade is the outstanding feature of the port's history in recent years.

* *From Customs Papers, Statement of Trade.*

It has been observed how all efforts to foster the herring fisheries in the north-east of Scotland in the seventeenth century were rendered abortive by lack of enterprise on the part of the people and the effective prosecution of the industry by foreigners.

The Dutch monopolised the fishing off the Scottish ports in the seventeenth century; in the early nineteenth the French were most in evidence, and proved a serious obstacle to the development of the home industry. French fishermen appeared early in July and remained for two or three months, frequently occupying the same fishing ground as the British. Their nets, though similar in size of mesh, were stronger and more clumsy than those of the British, and were said to injure the latter. Also, the French luggers enjoyed the privilege of purchasing fish from British fishermen and of curing them on board their own vessels in British harbours, a practice detrimental to the prosperity of British fishermen, affecting as it did the interests of those who cured fish for foreign markets.*

The first systematic attempt to establish deep-sea fishing at Aberdeen was made about 1836. A fishing boat of about 70 feet was built, but all attempts to induce fishermen to go further afield were in vain, and no real development took place till about 1870. Indeed, in 1861 when a question arose connected with the Fisheries Convention with France, it was stated that "the fishing carried on in the district of the port is on a small scale by a few natives."

About 1864 a small screw boat, the "Deacon," was started as a trawler. But the venture, and others of its kind came to nothing at that time. In 1868 the port's entire fishing fleet consisted of one decked steamer of

* *Customs Letters*, Collector to Board, 20th December, 1833.

26 tons and one decked lugger of 30 tons employed in the white deep-sea fishing; 124 open boats, averaging from 10 to 16 tons and manned by five of a crew, employed in the herring fishing; and 112 open boats from $3\frac{1}{2}$ to 5 tons navigated by three men, each engaged in the white fishing—the whole amounting to 237 sailing or row boats and one steamer with an aggregate tonnage of 2,032, and crews numbering 970 men.*

Line fishing with its dangers and vicissitudes to life and property had been carried on at Aberdeen from time immemorial, but the need for reorganization in the methods of fishing was first brought home to the seafaring cities of the north-east in 1881, when a fierce gale resulted in grave disaster to the herring fleet on the east coast. It was pointed out by various authorities that the time had come to follow the example of the pioneers at the Tyne and Wear by introducing steam in the catching of fish.

In 1882 the "Toiler," a paddle tug-boat built on the Tyne, was purchased in Dublin by an Aberdeen syndicate for £1550 and renovated by the owners for the trawl fishing. The vessel equipped with trawl gear left Aberdeen for her first trip on 23rd March, 1882. She fished mostly in Aberdeen bay or along the coast for a few miles to the north, and her catch for the first month realised about £207. It was thought that a screw boat would be more useful in the trade, as the "Toiler" rapidly showed signs of wear and tear. The s.s. "Bonita" was purchased in London, and thereafter screw iron trawlers began to be built at the port.

The first was the "North Star," built by Messrs. John Duthie, Sons, & Co., and the engines and boilers by Messrs. Hall, Russell & Co. Launched in September,

* *Customs Letters*, Collector to Board, 3rd August, 1868.

1883, the "North Star" from that time till May, 1891, landed £46,591 worth of fish.*

The industry continued to prosper, and the introduction of improved methods in catching the fish—the substitution of the "otter" for the "beam" gear—had far-reaching results. The closing of the Moray Firth to British trawlers in 1889 was a great blow to the trade, and incurred to Aberdeen alone, so authorities declare, the loss of hundreds of thousands of pounds in fish landed and sold, and in ships' stores and repairs.

The trawlers henceforth had to undertake longer journeys; ice for the preservation of fish was required in larger quantities, and in order to meet the demands of an industry increasing by leaps and bounds, ice companies were formed and various factories sprang up and flourished in the city.

In 1900 the fishing industry at Aberdeen gave employment to 8,600 people—1,800 resident fishermen, 4,300 curing-yard workers, 2,000 shipbuilders and repairers, and 500 ice, rope and net makers.†

With the opening of the new Fish Market in 1889, a fresh impetus was given to the industry. The revenue derived from fisheries was in 1888 £297 7s. 11d., while the following year it increased to £1,313 15s. 5d.

The white fish landed in 1882 was under £10,000 in value. With the advent of trawling, the quantity increased steadily till at the end of 1902, it had reached the total of 1,244,219 cwts., valued at £730,308.

In September, 1896, 2,649 barrels of herrings were cured and exported in one week, large consignments being sent to Danzig and Königsberg. Germany and

* *History of a Great Industry* (Wm. Pyper and others), p. 12.

† *Aberdeen Journal*, 6th January, 1900.

Russia were the chief markets for the Aberdeen fish, and thus the old commercial relations between the north-east of Scotland and the Baltic were revived.

Out of a total fleet of 320 steam trawlers working from the Scottish ports in 1911, 217 fished from Aberdeen. In 1891, 59 steam trawlers and 6 fishing liners belonged to the port; in 1910, 217 steam trawlers and 53 fishing liners. In 1893 the total number of fishermen belonging to the port and employed in trawling and line fishing was 1,405; in 1910, 2,127 were engaged on trawlers alone.*

From 1882 to 1902, 267 steam trawlers were built at Aberdeen by Messrs. Hall, Russell, Alexander Hall, and John Duthie, at an average cost of something like £4,500.

To-day, Aberdeen's claim to a leading position in the fishing industry is a just one, since she holds the world's record for one week's catch (5,049 tons). Her splendid fleet of modern steam fishing vessels, her skilled fishermen and expert navigators, her finely-equipped fish market and docks, her several miles of quayside, her large and modern shipbuilding and engineering yards, the healthy condition of her subsidiary trades, her system of refrigeration, which makes exportation to all parts of the world possible—to Spain, Portugal, West Indies, South America, and Australia—all these factors have contributed to gain for Aberdeen the place she holds in the fishing world.

The rapid growth of the fishing industry brought in its train a series of fresh developments in harbour reconstruction. Under the guidance of the Harbour Board such improvements as the New Torry Dock; the three Pontoon Docks; the deepening of the entrance channel by the use of a rock-splitting machine; wharfing the

* *Aberdeen Journal*, 14th June, 1911.

Dee; enlargement of the tidal harbour; widening the quays, etc., were undertaken and carried out. The success of these improvements was due in no small measure to the influence of elected Commissioners on the Harbour Board. The Commissioners at present number thirty-one, the Lord Provost, six Baillies, the Dean of Guild, eleven Town Councillors and twelve elected members, four of whom are appointed annually and retire every three years.

Originally Aberdeen harbour, as the corporate property of the burgh, was controlled exclusively by the Magistrates and Council. An Act of 1773 authorised the Town Council to carry out certain improvements in the harbour, and from time to time later Acts confirmed or extended their powers. All harbour affairs remained entirely in the hands of the Town Council till 1829, when to the nineteen Councillors were added five Burgesses of Guild and one member of the Incorporated Trades. Subsequently changes were made in the construction of the Board, the most important being the addition of twelve elected Commissioners, who were not required to be either Burgesses of Guild or members of the Incorporated Trades.

Aberdeen's trade, and her fishing industry in particular, have suffered severely through the Great War. Until 1913 trade figures showed a steady expansion. In that year the revenue increased by £5,700 over the previous year, this being due principally to the large amount of sugar imported direct from Hamburg and Rotterdam. A substantial increase in the number of vessels in the foreign trade can be accounted for in the greater number of German trawlers which brought their fish from Iceland to sell at the port instead of going to the Continent. In that year 1,260 ships from foreign ports entered the harbour and 642 cleared outwards.

In 1915 the total number inwards was only 507 and outwards 63, while the decline in the coasting trade was correspondingly great.*

The organisation of the fishing industry was shattered during the war, but since its termination every effort has been and is being put forth to revive and improve an enterprise on which the commercial prosperity of Aberdeen so largely depends.

The release of vessels and crews from Admiralty service has done much to help the trade, but general disorganization and trade depression, restrictive Government measures and chaotic conditions of exchanges, have prevented the resumption of commerce between Aberdeen and certain of her pre-war Continental markets.

The demand for steam trawlers and drifters, which before and during the war was high, has been greatly reduced so far as British owners are concerned. But Aberdeen shipbuilding firms are engaged in constructing large trawlers for the French, to be used for fishing off the Newfoundland coasts.

In the midst of a world-wide economic upheaval like the present, it is impossible to estimate what the future has in store for the nation, for Scotland, for the North-East, and for Aberdeen more particularly. But if the history of the port in the twentieth century reveals as great a measure of progress as that which marked the nineteenth, if it produces changes and improvements in the commercial life of the city as beneficial as those of last century, the continued prosperity of Aberdeen as a seaport will be assured.

* *Customs Papers*, Statement of Trade, 1913-15.

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